

BROKEN DOWN WALL: THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS
IN A BERMUDIAN THEOLOGY OF
RACIAL RECONCILIATION

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
DEDICATION	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	x
EPIGRAPH	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	4
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS	28
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS	56
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	80
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS	107
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS	125
APPENDIX	
A. APPENDIX A TITLE	154
B. APPENDIX B TITLE	157
BIBLIOGRAPHY	161

ABSTRACT

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Believing that the African Methodist Episcopal Church's meme "A Liberating and Reconciling People" is only partially realized in its North American liberationist praxis, a contextual theology that prioritizes reconciliation is offered as a remedy to the imbalance. Inspired by the impact of forgiveness in the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this inquiry explores a Bermudian congregation's experience with forgiveness in order to focus its ministry on reconciliation.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to the glory of my God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I celebrate my honey, darling, sweetheart, angel-baby: Anna Rochelle, my prayer-warrior ally and mother of our daughters, Brianna Ashley Lorneé and Tionae Serena Jade. I could not have done this without you, Rayathi.

I honour my mother, Velma Lorraine Bean; my father, the late Alfred Eugene Bean; and cherish my siblings: Daryl Lee, Jennifer Lynn and Janice Ann. I could not be me were it not for you all.

ABBREVIATIONS

AME	AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL
AMEC	AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
BME	BRITISH METHODIST EPISCOPAL
BMEC	BRITISH METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
CMG	COMPANION OF THE ORDER OF ST MICHAEL AND ST GEORGE
COVID 19	CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 19
CURB	CITIZENS UPROOTING RACISM IN BERMUDA
DIV.INST.	DIVINE INSTITUTES, LACTANTIUS, ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN FATHERS, VOL. VII
FC	THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: A NEW TRANSLATION
HBCU	HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES
INST	CALVIN'S INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION
IRB	INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD
RAAME	RICHARD ALLEN AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL
UNESCO	UNITED NATIONS EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

EPIGRAPH

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one — as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

— The Lord Jesus Christ, John 17:21, *New Living Translation*

INTRODUCTION

The gospel of Jesus Christ transforms people and the societies in which they live. The African Methodist Episcopal Church's ministry aims to fulfil both aspects in describing itself as "a liberating and reconciling people." After careful reflection on the denomination's meme, I conclude that reconciliation is the climatic objective of liberation, with forgiveness serving as a crucial catalyst in bringing about personal and social transformation. I have also come to believe that the AME Church is specially equipped to address deep personal as well as social rifts such as the long-lasting effects of racial discrimination in Bermuda.

I observed a tension between the denomination's reconciliatory roots and a praxis that is heavily skewed by a North American liberation theology. The denomination has participated in ecumenical exercises with other Christian bodies. In its history several mergers were proposed with other Methodist bodies, with one notable success. However, racial reconciliation is a comparatively infrequent, scattered endeavor in the United States where African Americans remain a significant but permanent racial minority. A different set of conditions exists offshore where a black majority population lives with a white minority within a mostly British-influenced social milieu on a tiny, isolated archipelago in the North Atlantic Ocean. These characteristics demand an appropriate adjustment in praxis.

A recalibrated stance in praxis is also required by the denomination's global expansion. New congregations in India and Brazil are being added to those that exist in Canada, the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the South American and African continents. Our liberating and reconciling church continues to show itself to be a viable entity in different countries. However, the church's mission must adapt to the unique features present within the various cultures. A North American liberationist praxis is not a good fit for every situation. Imitating the church's founder, Bishop Richard Allen, and his brand of reconciliatory social justice would better the denomination's chances of remaining relevant within these new contexts. The reconciling feature must be given greater respect, if not the lead, in the expanding global ministry of the AME Church.

Within these pages I proposed a reconciliation theology influenced by Bermudian experience through the foundation papers written at different phases of the program. Chapter One introduced the Ministry Focus, Richard Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church. I described the congregation's origins, its location in Bermuda's historic Towne of St. George, and the distinctive features that make RAAME a perfect place to practice a reconciliation ministry.

Chapter Two's Biblical Foundations noted what the scriptures say about the final state of society and how that future was secured. Isaiah 2:1-5 contains the glorious vision of racial unity marching in peace to Mount Zion, declaring in unity their obedience to God and destroying every instrument of war. Ephesians 2:11-21 complements the Isaiah text by showing Jesus Christ as the agent of reconciliation. Divisions dissolved when Christ presented humanity to God through the atoning work of the cross.

Chapter Three's Historical Foundations focused on Methodism's arrival in Bermuda. The beginnings of Methodism in England were followed by the movement's shift to the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. The dedication of the Cobb's Hill Methodist church in 1827, the visit of Bishop Willis Nazrey in 1870, and the merging of the Canadian brand with the United States brand in 1884 (during the age of imperialism) display African Bermudians' interaction with the most transformative movement in Protestantism.

Chapter Four presented my Theological Foundations. The case for a distinctly Bermudian theology received a surprising assist from within the North American Black theology field. James Deotis Robert's critique of James Harold Cone was helpful in arguing for the priority of reconciliation in a theology of liberation. The conversation also affirmed the importance of a people's unique experience in forming a contextual theological perspective. If the experience of African people in America was an indispensable ingredient for Black theology, then the experience of African people in Bermuda is equally essential in a Bermudian theology.

In Chapter Five's Interdisciplinary Foundations, social psychologists showed how forgiveness helped South Africa move out of apartheid. That a topic with strong religious connotations such as forgiveness had a relevant, powerful secular effect is remarkable. Even more significant is that the characteristics of South Africa's society bear a stronger resemblance to Bermuda than that of the United States.

Chapter Six described the forgiveness project that was deployed during the global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. The research features, results and outcome are examined with an eye toward further exploration and action.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

“Reunited, and it feels so good” croon Peaches and Herb, a rhythm and blues duo group. This break-up/make-up ballad captures a couple’s realization that the love they share is greater than the issues that stand between them. They resolved to set aside everything else for the sake of their relationship and bliss radiates in the refrain “Reunited, and it feels so good.”

As emotively powerful as this song is, a reflective Christian must ask if anything can be better than the joy of a restored spiritual relationship. Surely not, if the characters’ chatter canonized in the Song of Solomon is an accurate barometer. So too should the lived experience of those who have come into contact with the salvific work of the Lord Jesus Christ testify. The liberating and reconciling gospel of Jesus Christ, reuniting humans with their Creator and with one another, must have an effect equal to, if not better than, that celebrated by Peaches and Herb.

Context

The AME Church's meme identity is "A liberating and reconciling people."¹ A denomination formed by African Americans was not intended to serve African Americans exclusively. Bishop Richard Allen fought the racial discrimination of the day by asserting his people's right to be an independent body. Yet, he never disavowed his links with the other members of the North American Methodist movement. It was with the support of white citizens such as Benjamin Rush that Bishop Allen's enterprise came into being. It is in that spirit that a congregation bearing his name, located in the wealthiest black majority country in the world, can be a definitive example of a liberating and reconciling people.

RAAME in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of St. George's, Bermuda is a 159-member congregation. Founded in 1888 as Methodism brought liberation to African Bermudians' religious governance, this body of believers has a history of significant influence. RAAME's preserved narrative follows.

Brother Benjamin Burchall made his home available as the first place of worship and during the early years, services were held at the homes of the followers.

The membership of this Christian movement grew so rapidly that a lot of land at Mullet Bay was purchased and the cornerstone for a permanent structure was laid by Bishop Coppin assisted by Mr. Ronald Henry Duerden and Brother B. Alexander Richardson.

On October 15, 1902, the site on which the present church is built was obtained from Hezekiah Wales, Sr. In a ceremony — led by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Charles Spencer Smith, assisted by the Rev. Austin Richardson and Trustee Board members of the Church — the cornerstone was moved to the new site on May 5, 1903.

¹ As an illustration of its widespread acceptance, the declaration "The AME Church was founded in the spirit of liberation and reconciliation" appears in the introduction of the sexual misconduct policy statement as a basis for the "sacred trust" that is violated by such behaviour. AME Sunday School Union, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, TN: AME Sunday School Union, 2016), 332.

During the following years, the members worked together with one of the African Methodist stalwart Christians, Rev. Austin Richardson, and continued with the building program and erected the building, completing the lower floor.

It was on Saturday, December 25, 1909 at 3:30 p.m. that the lower floor was opened for church services. This partial accomplishment thrilled the members because eleven different places had been used for worship. Austin Richardson, because of his faithfulness and untiring efforts, was appointed pastor of the church.

During the pastorate of the Rev. Cecil Arnold Steward, the former church organ was purchased from the Imperial Government for 100 pounds. The trustees also applied to the Imperial Government, Sir James Wilcox, then Governor of the Islands, for a grant for the portion of the undisposed land situated at North Shore, St. George's, to be used as a cemetery. This request was granted to the church on June 14, 1917.

On August 5, 1924, the upper floor of the church was completed and dedicated to the honour and glory of God by the Rt. Rev. W. T. Vernon during the administration of Rev. H.L. Gault. During the years 1933 and 1937, Rev. C. McLaren Morgan was instrumental in having the old parsonage built and dedicated on August 19, 1937, by Rev. B. A. Galloway, pastor of St. Paul A.M.E. Church and Presiding Elder of the A.M.E. Churches in Bermuda.

Other additions and accomplishments of the Church followed. On October 30, 1949, in the 79th year of our church organization, we observed the Mortgage Burning Ceremony, led by Bishop D. Ward Nichols, D.D. L.L.D., assisted by Rev. L.S. McNeil and members of the Church. The church vestry was built during Rev. H.E. Burton's ministry. The bell, donated by Adderley brothers, was erected during the ministry of Rev. H. E. Cross. The aluminum steeple was donated by the late Hon. Leon D. Fox. Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Adderley donated the first stained glass window.

The steel girders installed to reinforce the upper floor were all erected during the administration of Rev. L. J. Burnham. On May 30, 1969, the new organ and renovated church and fittings were dedicated. This was a very happy period in the church's history under Pastor David L. Randolph with Bishop John D. Bright officiating.

During the ministry of Rev. Vernal Alford Jr., new toilet facilities were installed, and a new southern boundary wall built. During the administration of Rev. C. W. Heard, RAAME hosted the 1979 Annual Conference, at which time we carried out more renovation programs such as a roof over the rear steps connecting the church and school hall, the enlargement of the kitchen and re-concreting of the front church yard. During the ministry of Rev. E. Carlton Brown, there was a need for a counseling room. A portion of the stage was taken, and the room was erected in memory of the late Brother Darrell Nearon. One memorable moment during Rev. Brown's ministry was the celebration of four Golden Anniversaries: Bro. & Sis. Felix Richardson, Bro. & Sis. James Richardson, Bro. & Sis. Arthur Ming, and Bro. & Sis. Darrell Nearon. Another was the formation of the new gospel choir.

It was in August 1976 that Sis. Betty Furbert was granted an Exhorter's License. This was a first for Richard Allen. In April 1981, history was made in the 95th Session of the Bermuda Annual Conference as the Rev. Betty Furbert became the first Bermudian-born woman to be ordained as an Itinerant Deacon. In 1983, she was ordained an Itinerant Elder. She served as the pastor of St. John A.M.E. Church, Allen Temple A.M.E. Church, and St. Philip A.M.E. Church. In 2010 Rev. Betty Furbert-Woolridge (as she is now known) became the first female Presiding Elder in the Bermuda Annual Conference, retiring from the itinerant ministry on March 10, 2018.

In March 1982, Rev. Wilbur McLaren Lowe, Sr. was given the charge at Richard Allen. In August 1982, there were renovations to the parsonage. In June 1985, the church purchased a house and property (Windsor House) at Turkey Hill; St. George located behind the church building at a cost of \$365,000.00. In February 1988, the mortgage was paid in full.

Rev. Wilbur Lowe, Sr. retired as pastor of Richard Allen A.M.E. Church on March 26, 1994. The officers and members thank God for his ministry here in this corner of God's vineyard. The Church grew spiritually, physically, financially and in membership under the pastorate of Rev. Wilbur McLaren Lowe, Sr., who served this congregation well for twelve years.

On March 27, 1994 Rev. Samuel Hayward was given the charge at Richard Allen A.M.E. Church. During his pastorate the church parsonage was completely renovated with an extension and the beautifying of the property. In July 1995, Rev. Hayward moved into the parsonage with Mrs. Vera Hayward, his new bride. A liturgical dance ministry, "Dancers for Christ," was formed during Rev. Hayward's administration. This ministry has become an integral part of the RAAME worship experience. Rev. Hayward retired from active ministry and as pastor of Richard Allen in March 1997. On Sunday, March 23, 1997, Rev. Dr. Wilbur McLaren Lowe, Jr., was appointed pastor of Richard Allen A.M.E. Church. On May 16, 1997, a new piano was purchased and dedicated on Sunday, May 18, 1997.

Rev. Micah Chandler came to Richard Allen A.M.E. Church in 2002. He served well here for about two-and-a-half years at which time he was given another assignment. Upon Rev. Micah's arrival, the trustees did many repairs to and completely refurnished the parsonage.

In 2005, Rev. Dr. Conway M. Simmons was given the assignment of Richard Allen Church. The church continued to grow spiritually. Under his leadership of Rev. Simmons, the church held a banquet honouring members for outstanding service to the church over the years. In March 8, 2014, Rev. Simmons retired from the pastoral ministry after forty-nine years of service; nine of those years spent at Richard Allen.

Along with the persons mentioned above are other notables. Mr. Leonard Bascome was instrumental in getting Dr. Edwin Fitzgerald Gordon elected to the House of Assembly as a member from the parish of St. George's. Dr. Gordon was the Trinidadian-born firebrand leader of the Bermuda Worker's Association and the key figure in awakening the Afro-Bermudian's political will. Though fewer in number, power lay in the hands of the white minority, labeled by Dr. Gordon as

“The Forty Thieves.” This coup allowed Dr. Gordon to continue upsetting the powers that be, but Mr. Bascome suffered economic ruin as a result.

RAAME birthed other notable political figures. The Reverend Tobbit began a school for coloured children in the church hall before he became involved with the Marcus Garvey movement.² Dame Jennifer Smith led the Progressive Labour Party to victory in the 1980 General Election – the first-ever government formed by the African majority in Bermuda’s history. By that win, Dame Jennifer became the Premier of Bermuda. Mr. M. Dean Foggo, a trustee, and the Reverend Dr. Wilbur Lowe, Jr., also served as members of Parliament. And in her latest achievement Mrs. Renée Ming became the latest RAAME member to sit in the House of Assembly courtesy of the 2017 General Election.

Mr. Felix Richardson sat on the Corporation of St. George’s. Alexander “Bear” Daniels served as RAAME’s treasurer and “Mr. Fix-it”. His loss was so keenly felt by the members who dedicated a plaque bearing his image.³

RAAME’s location within the bounds of the Olde Towne makes them part of a historic preservation area. Due to the Towne’s UNESCO World Heritage site status, hundreds of thousands of tourists travel by air and sea to St. George.⁴ Some regular visitors make it a point to attend RAAME worship services. And living so closely to, and interacting with, the white community has created a unique dynamic found only in St. George’s. The congregation’s members have served as members of Parliament, members of the Senate, the Premiere of Bermuda, and members of the Corporation of St. George, even during the period when the municipality was dominated by white interests.

The Parish of St. George’s is 3.9 square miles in size and has a population density of 1,451 persons per square mile (the smallest density among parishes in Bermuda). The

² Frederick Ming, “History of East End Primary School,” Handout – PDF, Alumni – Service Day, East End Primary School, St. George’s, Bermuda, 2016.

³ Richard Allen Church History, “Richard Allen Membership Manual,” 30-33.

⁴ Tourist numbers for 2018 amounted to 770,683 guests. The Towne sees approximately 500,000 visitors annually. Matthew Howe, *2018 Visitor Arrivals Report Full Year*, https://www.gotobermuda.com/sites/default/files/2018_year_end_report_final.pdf.

median age of St. George's residents is forty-three years old; 52% are female; 59% are black. 89% have health insurance coverage, which is slightly below the national figure of 92%. The unemployment rate is higher in St. George's (10%) than in Bermuda as a whole (7%). The median annual household gross income is also below the national average (\$84,247 versus \$93,713).⁵

Struggling to find a place of worship to call their own, this fledgling group moved from house to house, using the Town Hall of St. George's on occasion, until the generosity of the Wales family provided them a plot of land they could call their own. Their history details the physical development of their edifice and the pastors who led them. An opportunity to obtain land from the government for a burial ground makes them unique among the AME congregations in Bermuda in having their own cemetery. RAAME's location within the bounds of the Olde Towne makes them part of a historic preservation area. And living so closely to, and interacting with, the white community has created a unique dynamic found only in St. George's.

As members of the congregation age and the country changes, RAAME is increasingly finding itself forced to adapt. The generational divide, neighborhood issues, the economic realities of inhabiting the most expensive place on the globe to live in, community-splitting disputes over economic, labor, and human rights which are always tinged by the pervasive issues of race and immigration, are among the challenges facing a congregation living in the world's second most church-populated country. Operation World said about Bermuda: "The disparity of wealth and the aging population will test the practical righteousness of the churches as will the influx of immigrants from poorer

⁵ "2016 Population and Housing Census – St. George's Parish Profile," <https://www.gov.bm/2016-population-and-housing-census-parish-profiles>.

Caribbean nations.”⁶ I believe the answer lies in a RAAME ministry modality based on a symbiotic relationship between liberation and reconciliation.

RAAME had golden moments where its spiritual influence had that kind of impact. The most recent era was during the ministry of the Reverend Wilbur and Mother Edith Lowe, Sr. People were getting saved in droves. Extra chairs had to be put in the aisles to accommodate attendees. Property was purchased, and the mortgage was speedily paid off. Men from across the racial and social spectrum came from every parish to participate in a vibrant male fellowship. Later, the Reverend Dr. Wilbur Lowe, Jr. had a season of service similar to that of his father’s. This was a time when RAAME really felt good.

RAAME still retains vestiges from that time. The members are enthusiastic worshipers. There is a strong bond of love among the membership. They will rally to financially support their church in a crisis. Tourists worshipping with RAAME on their vacations are often drawn back to the Sunday morning service when they return to Bermuda because of the experience. St. Georgians are very fluid in their church allegiances. They frequently visit other congregations. Some held memberships in more than one congregation! Several belonged to other fellowships before joining RAAME. Their theological outlook prioritizes being a member of the universal church over their local church membership. This ecumenical predisposition makes it easy for members to cross racial and denominational lines in friendship and cooperation.

There is the Walk to Calvary, an annual Easter pageant sponsored by the East End Ministerial Alliance. For more than thirty years members from almost every Christian

⁶ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, Book, 21st ed (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 151.

congregation in St. George's recreate the passion scenes of the Lord Jesus Christ.

RAAME is a major contributor of leadership, material resources, and talent working together with other Christians.⁷

There is the liturgical dance ministry. Twenty years ago, a member invited dance trainers to Bermuda to hold workshops. Once the ministry gained a foothold in RAAME, members from other fellowships became involved. Liturgical dance spread like wildfire across Bermuda. Dance troupes participated in gospel concerts, parades on public holidays, and special days like weddings and funerals. Recently, there was a celebration featuring ten groups (including a secular dance studio) that show-cased the island-wide influence of RAAME's ministry.

The good-feeling balloon has deflated somewhat. RAAME's sanctuary needs major renovation or replacement. Attendance is not what it once was. The church's financial picture requires improvement. Complaints about cliques, conflict, maintenance, and communication are joined with concern about the ageing membership, the need for more outreach and the training of new, younger leaders.

Members nostalgically recall the Lowe years and their idea of RAAME's future is a re-creation of that period. When asked how to move ahead, members reference the Lowe's years/activities more often than any other pastor: "When Rev. Lowe was here, we did . . ." or "This happened in Rev. Lowe's time . . ." Successive pastoral administrations were held to the Lowe standard. When they fell short or deviated from that standard,

⁷ "Good Friday Walk to Calvary in East End, April 19, 2019," [www.bernews.com](http://www.bernews.com/2019/04/good-friday-walk-to-calvary-in-east-end-april-19-2019/).<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCZoPn2CfyE>.

disappointment and conflict resulted. For some congregants, RAAME will never again be what they remember.

The congregation reflects the prevalent mindset of the community. The Town of St. George wears a very exclusive brand: a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site. Other UNESCO sites include the Taj Mahal of India, the pyramids of Egypt, and the Great Wall of China. The Town's distinction is "an outstanding example of the earliest English urban settlement in the New World."⁸ Preservation means that change is strictly regulated and, as with the Towne, so too the townspeople. Their curious relationship with change has members wishing for change, but not working to bring about the change so earnestly desired. And that change is linked to preserving the past and the personalities associated with it.

The accelerating rate of change in Bermuda presents challenges to this St. George's mindset. Yet, these challenges also present several opportunities for RAAME to make a difference. One example concerns the activities of an expatriate AME pastor serving elsewhere in Bermuda. This gentleman has raised social activism to a high level, even to provoking civil disobedience and work-stoppages. He became a local hero by winning a court fight with the Bermuda Government over his immigration status. He is extremely liberation-slanted with a North American outlook and a penchant for confrontation. He is far less concerned about reconciliation, especially when it comes to reaching across the racial divide. His actions and attitude have damaged relationships within his denomination and the larger Christian community.

⁸ "Historic Town of St. George," www.UHC.unesco.org.

Another divisive current topic, LGBTQ matters, draws battle lines between the more secularized white and expatriate communities that share North American and Western European values, and the mostly black, mainly religious majority that reflects a Caribbean worldview.

The most controversial provision for each of the Caribbean territories is the right to marry. This is not because those territories are opposed to the institution of marriage — quite the reverse — but because they are unanimously opposed to same-sex marriages and marriages involving a transsexual marrying a person who is of the birth sex of the transsexual.⁹

Bermuda made news by becoming the first country in the world to roll back same-sex marriage.¹⁰ Some RAAME members have made it very clear that if the denomination accommodates a more affirming stance, they will leave the church.

The 2016 census showed the median personal income for black people dropped 13% since 2010, while white persons saw a 1% increase. The economic disparity remains a legacy from slavery and segregation. It also evidences the continued economic dominance of the white minority. There is room for African Bermudians to tip the balance in their favor, as happened with emancipation in 1834 and by taking the government of the country in 1998. The economic hurdle may take longer to get over, and that achievement is complicated by the international business presence. But still, the opportunity to make a difference does exist. The AME Church fluffed an earlier shot at economic empowerment, but new possibilities are being identified and explored.

⁹ Ian Hendry and Susan Dickson, *British Overseas Territories Law* (Oxford, UK: Hart Publishing, 2011, 156.

¹⁰ “Bermuda's Government Fights Against Same-Sex Marriage In Court Of Appeal,” CNN, November 8, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/08/world/bermuda-government-same-sex-marriage-appeal/index.html>.

Economic empowerment remains a ministry possibility, along with the plight of black males, substance abuse, sexual abuse, and political governance.

What a moment in which to recapture the Bermudian character of adaptability! This attribute enabled Bermuda to survive as an isolated group of islands eight hundred miles from the nearest point of land. Bermudian adaptability saw this country move from tobacco farming, through piracy to a becoming military outpost, then on to agriculture, tourism, reinsurance and now the cryptocurrency market. RAAME's contribution can be to strike the right balance between liberation and reconciliation as Bermuda cultural change moves on at a dizzying pace. Unity around something more lasting than tragedy or a sports accomplishment like the America's Cup sailing competition.¹¹ would be a tremendous "feel good." What would have to take place first is to address the skew toward liberation and tilt ministry back toward reconciliation.

Ministry Journey

My arrival at RAAME comes at an opportune moment. I can help RAAME to positively influence relationships between Christian fellowships and within the country. I have the racially diverse relationships to do the job. I have grown up with many of the island's Christian leaders. Those with whom I did not share such a history are acquaintances or I know of their families. That is what happens when living on an island where people know your car's registration number! My time in Warwick Academy enabled me to be familiar with many of my white sisters and brothers.

¹¹ Christopher Clarey, "How Bermuda Landed the America's Cup", The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/sports/how-bermuda-landed-the-americas-cup.html>. Retrieved November 11, 2020.

Relationships are important. Take note of the April's MLK50 celebrations in Memphis, Tennessee, that were webcast by the Southern Baptist Convention. The idea for the event came from a group of clergy persons, black and white, banding together to improve their community. During the organizer's panel discussion, the question was asked about how to bridge that ever-present racial divide. Each panel member agreed that it was the positive personal relationships between themselves that made the difference. I have similar relationships that can make reconciliation work.

I participated in projects that had reconciliation as a goal. The West End Ministerial Alliance, an interdenominational group in Sandys' Parish, coordinated young people's services in which I took a leading role. Then there was a Unity of the Spirit Conference where three black denominational heads pulled most of Bermuda's churches together for a unified time of worship and community action planning. I worked in the AME Church's organizing cadre and ran one of the workshops. United by Faith followed a few years later to pick up where the Unity of the Spirit effort left off. As a part of the AME Church's Bicentennial, I organized Bermuda's Ecumenical Service. I make it my business to participate in ecumenical groups to build bridges across denominational divides.

My training prepared me for an undertaking like this. My discipleship group was non-denominational. My formal education has taken place in different settings: a local public primary school, a multi-racial secondary school, a professional education in the United Kingdom; a North American HBCU undergraduate, and an evangelical theological degree. Along with the diversity of settings comes a passion for spiritual knowledge generated in part by the intellectual pursuit of the holy. My faith strives for

understanding, availing itself of scholastic methods as well as spiritual means. I am trained for this task.

There is the degree of exposure I have received. The number of people, languages and cultures encountered in my life during my merchant navy career have been many, from the nationalities of fellow crewmembers to the people encountered in the ports we called on. My formal education was one cultural immersion after the other. Some of the churches I have ministered in are in countries other than my own. Many people may agree that one visit outside your familiar space can alter one's perspectives. My life is an amalgam of experiences that have shaped, transformed, and tempered my outlook, philosophy, and theology.

I am still excited enough to want to make a difference. Earlier on in my ministry service I was gung-ho to do whatever I could with any opportunity the Lord presented to work His gifting out in my life. My early desire to serve Him was first ignited by the knowledge that He was calling me to preach the gospel. Later, as the time for ordination was pushed back again and again, the Lord sustained me through making education opportunities open for me. After graduation from seminary, I was excited to be offered a full-time assistant pastor position and have the next step of becoming a senior pastor peek over the horizon.

But my excitement met the realities of full-time ministry. Pompous church members chilled it. Falling short of my own expectations chilled it. The cut-throat politics of the church and my own blunders committed in trying to minister to others chilled it. Getting to the implementation of an economic program that could set the denomination on a sure and prosperous financial footing only to see it undermined,

chilled it. Being part of a denomination so committed to social justice but acts in an imperialistic way toward its overseas regions chilled it. A diagnosis of diabetes chilled it.

My excitement was diminished but not extinguished. My passion to serve the Lord preserves it. Successes like the renovation of two church buildings preserve it. Small improvements in RAAME's affairs sustains it. Doing my doctorate fans its flame. I am excited again as another layer of my purpose peels back to reveal what the Lord is doing with me.

From my first day as pastor of RAAME, I determined that, first, I would serve all the people of St. George's and not only the members of the congregation. That is aided by the reality that almost everybody in St. George's is related to everybody else! Along with my pastoral responsibilities, I began to work as a tour guide for the UNESCO World Heritage Site. In my tours I meet up with members of the church, their relatives, the people of St. George's and the tourists who visit our island. Last year, I guided one thousand people around the Town. This, and popping into the neighborhood schools, keeps me occupied and engaged in community ministry.

Another priority is to stabilize the church's finances. This entails shifting the giving focus more toward generosity and less about tithing as our goal. Our financial system is undergoing an overhaul by moving our accounting to an online platform. We are trying to keep the congregation informed, so social media is giving us more ways to help members stay in touch with what is going on in RAAME.

Finally, we are visioning a renewed physical plant. We are not only going down the trail toward construction (again!), but new procedures clarifying the roles and

responsibilities of officers is intended to make the lines clear enough so that people stay in their lanes.

Most of all, the Lord has called me to preach the gospel. I see everything that has happened in my life coming together in serving God's calling on my life. My background, training, experiences, my interests in apologetics, a more balanced approach to the area of Christian systematic theology, the walking tour and pastoring are employed in making me the preacher that I am. My desire is to preach the gospel in all its fullness, which makes it important to me to place liberation and reconciliation in their respective places of priority.

Develop the Synergy

Described above are measures being put into place now. Behind the recollection is a high degree of optimism and hope, revealing a belief that reconciliation would be a benefit for the church and the country. One could ask how such a good thing not be in place already? There are obstacles to it.

Bermuda's legacy of chattel slavery and discrimination is a major contributing factor. The structures persist that suppressed the avenue to freedom by African peoples and consolidated white minority dominance. The first laws passed to regulate black people in British colonies were legislated in Bermuda. Emancipation brought freedom for slaves, but it brought no economic relief. On the other hand, slaveowners were compensated for the loss of their slaves. Laws were put into place that tied the franchise to property ownership. That put the right of civic privilege out of the hands of most blacks and poor whites (many of the latter were grandfathered in). And one of the most

glaring places of inequality was in religious matters. Congregations with white memberships enjoyed state support; black fellowships found themselves hampered by legal hurdles and second-class status. The AME Church story is so remarkable in that a disadvantaged, yet determined, people made progress and established the AME Church as a spiritual and social force for black people in Bermuda.

Some people are heavily invested in division. Space is scarce at the top of the power pyramid. The more people one can exclude, the more power one can accrue. That is a view from the top of the pyramid; the more people one keeps out, the more influence one retains for themselves. This also holds true for the bottom tier as well. A person relies on division to empower him or herself by being an advocate for the disadvantaged. The split gives a cause, a platform and an audience: just the elements that attract demagogues. Reconciliation would take that power away; therefore, it is in some people's interests that reconciliation be resisted.

Division also gives some people a justification to vent anger, jealousy and to shirk responsibility, all under the guise of fighting injustice. Without denying the validity of confrontation, note what confrontation based on reconciliation can achieve. One powerful illustration is the influence of Mahatma Gandhi in winning freedom for India from the British. In this case a majority people won their independence without turning the oppressor into an enemy through anger – and violence. Although this act of liberation was not an easy thing to accomplish, yet Gandhi inspired the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's methods and led King to become a civil rights icon. Another example of this principle in action is the ongoing transformation of South Africa from a harsh white minority government to a black majority government.

Jealousy is difficult to strain out from justice. Inequality assumes that every person is entitled to equal treatment and equal access to goods, services and freedom. While it is correct to robustly challenge wrongs, it is not acceptable to use wickedness to address inequities. This was evidenced by the riots of 1977. Bermuda's black anger sparked by an assassin's execution spilled over into violence. White businesses were vandalized. Some were burned. But some black businesses were given the same treatment. One must question the motivation behind actions like these. Do I do wrong because someone else has something that I want? Reconciliation assumes that each person is of equal value and reaches across to embrace the person opposite without demeaning them or causing them harm.

Competition is another obstacle for reconciliation. Competing for members out of the same population can breed disunity. Doctrinal disagreements encourage some to proselytize more zealously than they evangelize. Some fellowships (and pastors) join ecumenical groups because it allows them greater influence than they would have on their own. When church membership is declining, just as the costs and burdens of ministry are increasing, this is no time to risk losing one's base to a "pie-in-the-sky" ideal like reconciliation, some may argue.

Finally, there are people who simply want nothing to do with people who are different from them. Every rational basis and sound argument will fail to move them. This reason, along with others mentioned previously, make reconciliation between congregations a challenge.

Bearing the possibilities and obstacles in mind, this discussion turns to consider how a Doctor of Ministry project can benefit RAAME. Can the pastor's academic project

help a congregation become a voice that can speak truth to power on the one hand and speak love to people on the other? Can an applied theology fulfill a deep desire of RAAME that is evidenced by its own history and was practiced by the founder of the AME Church, after whom the congregation is named? It can. A scrutiny of the congregation's dynamics, history and environment is of considerable worth. What the pastor and people learn from a more objective observation exercise will help them think differently, and a little more deeply, about their situation. The pastor is graced with a better understanding of his context. Background material permits him to better understand his people, filling in the knowledge gaps with information that the people often assume that he already possesses. There is also information uncovered that some people may not want to be known. A Doctor of Ministry project will verify the maxim that knowledge is power.

This proposed Doctor of Ministry project offers an implementable solution. The undertaking is not merely speculative. Because it is solution-oriented, its result is to produce an outcome that goes beyond describing a problem and offering recommendations. Something can be done! Here is an opportunity to breathe new life into the Bermudian "can do" spirit. Locals are very good at complaining. Arguments over the best way to address issues and problems are frequent and fierce. But many will acknowledge that critiques outweigh actions. This proposed Doctor of Ministry project avoids that fault by making knowledge doable.

The Doctor of Ministry project divides responsibility between the members and the pastor. Since RAAME is a pastor-led church, the congregation's failures are attributed to the leadership while successes are given to the Lord! The level of success

envisioned by this paper will require much from the pastor and the people, too. Here is an illustration of the truism that a pastor's accomplishments are tied to the cooperation of the people.

Present relationships can be improved through this Doctor of Ministry project. When people are made aware that an attempt is being made to improve a situation that is dear to their hearts, people may be more inclined to buy into it. RAAME cares about the other churches in the neighborhood, most of which are filled with relatives and friends. A reconciliation project can strengthen ties that already exist between churches. The pastor can use this project to improve relationships with fellow clergy by seeking them out for consultation and advice. A project can provide an excuse to open and upgrade lines of communication.

The possibility of resolving divisions with direct action is tantalizing to an ecumenically minded believer. Reunion can feel so good when making new friends of former foes. It is the wish of many RAAME members that the churches can get "together" to turn neighbors into friends. This reconciliation project can help make that wish a reality.

Reestablishing reconciliation as an AME theological priority would be a welcomed consequence of a Doctor of Ministry project. Reconciliation should be high on any ministry's values list because God is engaged in being reconciled with God's creation. The purpose of the Lord Jesus' birth, death, resurrection and return is to make reconciliation possible. The apostle Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was a massive paradigm shift that reconciled Jew and Greek together in the gospel. An AME ministry is,

by history and definition, a twin mission of liberation and reconciliation. A project so oriented would tick many boxes of Christian theology all at once.

A personal passion would be fulfilled through this Doctor of Ministry project by adding another Bermudian voice to the global theological discourse. The writer is aware of Francis Patton, the twelfth president of Princeton Theological Seminary, who was born and died in Bermuda.¹² Dr. Patton is an example of a Bermudian who made a significant contribution in the discipline. Learning about him comes at a time when diverse voices are coming forward as legitimate sources of theological reflection. Jahkimmo Smith's examination about not knowing one's neighbours that put the Bermudian trait of close community under scrutiny is another example.¹³ This Bermuda project can join the growing field of Caribbean theology coming from territories that share similar histories and culture.

RAAME's influence can extended further through this project. This discussion has focused on the Walk to Calvary and the implications rising from it. The dance ministry illustrates another way which RAAME impacted the community. It is an exciting possibility that RAAME's example can help other congregations to get "together." As the St. George's context is studied and its findings applied to the community, a mental post-it note saying "Portable!" will always be present.

One final thought to end this point of the discussion is that younger people are reluctant to join churches that appear hostile to people. This point deserves more attention

¹² "Francis Landey Patton," <http://www.bermudabiographies.bm/Biographies/Biography-Francis%20Landey%20Patton.html>.

¹³ Jahkimmo Smith, "Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church: Kindling Community Through Service and Conversation", (D.Min, Drew Theological Seminary, 2013), 3.

than this brief mention. However, a ministry built on reconciliation can be seen as trying to build, not burn, bridges between different kinds of people. It is not imagined that every disagreement will be resolved. However, reaching out will present an opportunity to communicate across dividing lines, a quality that resonates with millennials and beyond.

An AME church named after its founder can honor him, not only by bearing his name, but by also carrying out his vision. RAAME enjoys a prominent position among St. George's congregations, has a great relationship with them and is disposed to working closely with them. The network of St. George's families and friends presents a means to absorb the wider community in a reconciliation project. RAAME's pastor has the experience, skills and desire to work with the congregation in doing something that is close to their hearts. Community divisions are fertile ground to do work in reconciliation.

Here is an extra chance for RAAME to project its influence in another facet of Bermuda life. Historically, this church has gone outside its four walls and effected positive change in people's lives. The quality of a fellowship that draws repeat guests, the Walk to Calvary and the dance ministry displaying RAAME's creative attributes and members' appetite for new outreach experiences is a recipe for trying something different that may catch on elsewhere. A Bermudian model for practical righteousness would help transform resident churches from theological consumers to exporting insights, methods and practices that are products of local experiences.

A Doctor of Ministry project offers the opportunity to make a positive difference in a deeply rooted, long-term contention in Bermuda. The church is compelled to act since its mission is one massive reconciliation project. Such an action reflects foundational principles: to love the Lord, to love each other and to make disciples.

RAAME's community contribution will be to offer a love not based on shifting, selfish human emotion, or on materialism. It will be a pure love that is selfless and affirming the God-worth of every human being. Racial prejudice has scarred Bermuda. What many Bermudians long for is a unity that is not confined to a special event or a photo-op. Is there a place where humanity is joined together in harmony and equality?

Yes, there is.

A community's wellness hinges on maintaining its best values. Qualities like hospitality, generosity and courtesy have, through the best and worst of times, become resilient Bermudian personality traits. Such qualities are, in their essence, spiritual. The Lord Jesus Christ's teaching, which asserts that we love God above all else and that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves, undergirds the best of the Bermudian spirit. There is, then, a link between the state of community and its regard for spiritual values. When spirituality is healthy, the community flourishes; if set aside, neglected or ignored, society's wellness suffers.

Here lies the impact of our spiritual societies. Consider their public influence. For example, the Christian church is Bermuda's longest-serving institution. Before a legislative body was gaveled into session or a place of commerce opened its doors for business, people congregated to worship God. The church became a curator of community unity, its most consistent meeting place. The church served as the hub of the Bermudian family's most significant moments: celebrating life's milestones of birth, marriage and death. What does it say about Bermudian religiosity when the ratio between places of worship and its population is among the highest in the world?

Most importantly, it is the spiritual tenets published by religious institutions that make them so vital to community wellness. With its prophetic voice the congregation becomes the country's conscience by saluting society's successes, reprimanding its failures and enabling its recovery. Equipped with a healthy spiritual conscience, the community's wellness is fortified. An awareness of a higher moral authority brings with it a firm sense of right and wrong. Gratitude for God's grace is motivation to serve others and to place their well-being above one's own. Self-sacrifice replaces selfishness. Despair is displaced by hope. The church is vital to the wellness of the country.

Reconciliation also points to a theological certainty – unity will be imposed, not achieved. God will make unity a reality by fiat. The church's role is to help people to experience the best aspects of that new regime. Notwithstanding the difficulty in taking on a mammoth challenge like this, doing so would energize the congregation by keeping it current and engaged in matters that are germane to the country.

Reconciliation has other beneficial side-effects. Fractured relationships within the fellowship can be made whole. The love among members is a highly valued quality within the church. Internal conflicts and divisions can be amicably addressed and resolved. Building and maintaining an atmosphere of conciliation and genuine affection would be a bonus.

Conclusion

Reconciliation as the goal of liberation is the authentic "big tent" under which to gather people of diverse backgrounds and cultures. The Lord Jesus' prayer was that we

be one. In a church-dense place like Bermuda, reconciliation would feel so good to the Christians who live here!

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The gospel of Jesus Christ transforms people and the societies in which they live. The African Methodist Episcopal Church's ministry aims for both as it addresses a person's spiritual, social and physical development.

One AME meme reflects the Church's self-belief as "a liberating and reconciling people." These twin elements of freedom and fellowship can position the AME Church to play a much-needed role in culture today, fraught as it is, with courtesy, conflict and tribalism. Consider how influential that voice would be which draws into cooperation and collaboration people of various political, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

The name of the denomination communicates its origin, polity and government. The AME Church is African in that it was started by persons of African descent. Methodism describes its doctrine and polity. The form of government is episcopal – bishops are the church's chief executives. Begun in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1794 by Richard Allen, the AME Church spread throughout the United States and now has members in twenty districts in thirty-nine countries on five continents.¹

¹ Dennis Dickerson, "Our History," www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-history.

The AME Church in Bermuda is viewed as the black liberation denomination, a model set by its North American parent. The Church was the leading advocate for social equality and social action. Some credit this distinction to the sociological, not doctrinal, circumstances surrounding its origin. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones formed separate churches after they led African worshipers out of Philadelphia's St. George's Church in protest over racial discrimination. AME Church history in Bermuda is replete with examples of speaking truth to the powerful on behalf of its African-diaspora constituency. Its reconciliatory efforts reflect a more Bermudian trait, a quality born out the experience of a majority black population living in a British social pattern with a white minority on a small, isolated archipelago in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Richard Allen AME Church in St. George's, Bermuda has proven the potency of reconciliatory ministry without fully appreciating its power. The dance ministry begun within the congregation spread throughout Bermuda, evangelistically inspiring religious and secular artists from diverse backgrounds in their shared passion. Then for over thirty years, RAAME partnered with local Christian churches in a Good Friday pageant now known as "The Walk to Calvary" that winds its way through the UNESCO World Heritage Site that is the Towne of St. George. Hundreds of locals and visitors to the island follow the cast as scenes of Christ's passion are played out at various sites around the town. The collegiality experienced among St. George's Christians draws believers from all over the country to join the cast, become members of the production crew or to invite others to walk with them in the audience.

The Walk to Calvary also offers a connection for the various ethnicities within congregations to cooperate in other ways. A pastor of one congregation can become a

walk-on participant in another congregation's event. Members of different congregations work together to serve free meals to people in the community. Singers and musicians perform together in multi-denominational music ensembles. Church members serve together in secular community organizations. They also form other interesting social connections.

These examples show RAAME to be an excellent context to explore how a fuller theological understanding of the gospel can take hold of a community and positively influence a country. A project titled "Broken Down Wall: The Role of Forgiveness in a Bermudian Theology of Reconciliation" will be based on the Old Testament scripture Isaiah 2:1-5 and the New Testament epistle of Ephesians 2:11-22, texts which speak to the awesome universal unity to come and the agent through whom humans can experience it.

Literary Elements of Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah is one of the books found grouped in the prophetic writings regarded as those of a major prophet. The traditional view credits the prophet Isaiah with writing the book that bears his name. George Gray called a one-author hypothesis erroneous based on three different historical elements present in the text: prophecies of the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.E., plus the work of a post exilic editor. He believed that some of the prophecies may indeed have originated with Isaiah but were combined with other prophecies and narratives at least two centuries later. On prophecy, he displayed the

historical critical bias of historical conditioning that assumes that the historic conditions presuppose the writing of the text.²

John Oswalt believes the burden of proof to rest on those who wish to dispense with the centuries old traditional view.³ Regarding Isaiah, he summarizes critics' arguments as being based on (a) the change of style between chapters one to thirty-nine and forty to sixty-six; (b) persons in the future are explicitly addressed, something the other prophets do not do; and (c) that specific prediction is impossible, and that where it appears one must assume the text must be contemporary with, or following after, the event it describes. In rebuttal, Oswalt noted that the practice of ascertaining authorship based on style is not an exact science. Differences in style could reflect different subject matter. Secondly, there is physical evidence for unity; the oldest available manuscripts are one physical unit. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the various redactional schools proposed by critics ever existed.⁴

This examination will posit a logical and ideological unity, along with Oswalt and Brevard Childs, that the prophet referenced throughout the book is the source of its contents, and that prophetic utterances predated the events of which they speak, except in the case of the narratives.

Isaiah himself was said to be of royal blood. He received the call to be a prophet “in the year that king Uzziah died.”⁵ Some speculate his closing ministry to be about the

² G. B. Gray, *The Book of Isaiah*, ICC Vol (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), xxxi.

³ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), Olive Tree Bible Software.

⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*.

⁵ Isa. 6:1.

time of Sennacherib's siege. Isaiah was married to a prophetess and the couple had two children. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah met his death by being sawn in half during Manasseh's reign.⁶

Isaiah's text has a strong preservation history. The earliest witness is the Dead Sea scroll 1Q^a. Its consistency with the Ben Asher text of 1009 A.C.E. showcases the remarkable heritage of painstakingly copying the text.⁷ The book of Isaiah is a mixture of several literary elements. Narratives are in prose; the oracular pronouncements take the form of poetry. Hebrew poetry is distinctive by the parallelism of ideas. There is less reliance on homophones and more attention given to the arrangement of concepts.

Isaiah 2:1-5 is strikingly like Micah 4:1-5. A question of originality arises: which one came first? One part of the answer rests in considering the superscriptions in Isaiah 1:1/2:1 and Micah 1:1. Both prophets appear in the reigns of three out of four Judean kings, placing them within the same period of history, in the same region of the world and experiencing similar (if not identical) socio-religious climates. Both visions have a common focus (Jerusalem) then diverge into two different directions; Micah's to the northern Kingdom (Samaria); Isaiah's to the South (Judah). Notice must be drawn to the fact that Isaiah's book holds a collection of prophetic "words" while Micah records only one. Both visionaries are advocates for Yahweh in a covenant lawsuit against his people.

⁶ N. H. Ridderbos, "Isaiah," in *New Bible Dictionary*, eds. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 512.

⁷ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 38.

Historical Setting of Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah served in the Divided Kingdom during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, a period between 840-740 BCE. These rulers led Judah during its descent into idolatry while trying to cope with the superpowers surrounding them. It was during Hezekiah's reign that the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians.⁸

Isaiah's prophetic career was served within the borders of the Southern Kingdom, with its capital Jerusalem as the primary geographic background of the text. The name "Jerusalem" is apparently of Semitic origin. It was variously named "Salem" in connection with Melchizedek, Moriah, and Jebus. The city was previously occupied by Canaanites. The tribe of Judah burned Jerusalem during the Canaanite conquest and David conquered the city during his reign, making it his capital.⁹

Jerusalem as "Zion" occurs one hundred and fifty times in the Old Testament. A word with an uncertain etymology plus an indefinite precise meaning, the City of David situated on the southeast hill of Jerusalem was known as Zion.¹⁰ The Temple Mount to the north and the hill south of the southwest corner of today's Old City have been named as Zion as well. The term has also been applied to identify Jerusalem as a religious capital.¹¹

Jerusalem rests on two ridges on a limestone plateau. With the Judean mountains to the west and the Judean desert sloping toward the Dead Sea to the east, it was noted

⁸ Simplybible.com, "Background to Isaiah," www.simplybible.com/f59a-background-to-isaiah.htm.

⁹ Philip J. King, "Jerusalem (Place)," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 751.

¹⁰ 2 Sam. 5:7.

¹¹ King, "Jerusalem (Place)," 751.

that the rugged terrain made the city easy to defend, but difficult for commercial trade not only because the other Palestinian centers lay in the plain below, but also that Jerusalem was removed from the major trade routes.¹²

The Jebusite Jerusalem contained approximately one thousand people. The number was doubled in the city of David. Solomon's extension grew the population to forty-five hundred to five thousand. Jerusalem expanded further during Hezekiah's administration to around twenty-five thousand residents, caused in part to an influx of people from the Northern Kingdom and other regions of Judea.¹³

Jerusalem is a major theological feature in the both the Old Testament and New Testament.

The name Jerusalem occurs more than 650 times in the Old Testament, especially in the historiographies (Samuel, Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles). With the exception of two possible references, it is absent from the Pentateuch, not having yet gained historical prominence in that period. Jerusalem appears frequently in the Psalms and also in the Prophets where there are some forty-nine occurrences in Isaiah, 102 in Jeremiah, twenty-six in Ezekiel, and eight in Micah. In the New Testament, Jerusalem appears more than 140 times, sixty-seven of which are in the Gospels, but never in the Catholic epistles.¹⁴

The prophets saw Jerusalem through the “Zion tradition,” which comprises the following motifs: Yahweh, the great king, chooses Jerusalem as a permanent abode; Zion (not Sinai) as Yahweh’s chosen mountain, located at the center of the world; the Gihon spring as the miraculous stream flowing from the cosmic mountain; the pilgrimages of other nations to Jerusalem to acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh; and the inviolability of Jerusalem. Jerusalem’s deliverance from the siege of Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. created

¹² King, “Jerusalem (Place),” 751.

¹³ King, “Jerusalem (Place),” 753.

¹⁴ King, “Jerusalem (Place),” 764.

the impression of the city's invincibility under all circumstances, thus reinforcing the Zion tradition.¹⁵

This belief led the inhabitants to believe that Jerusalem was indestructible since God's presence was its protection. The prophets decried this false confidence in the face of the nation's idolatry. They predicted a day of accountability but also gave assurance that Jerusalem's eternal legacy was guaranteed.¹⁶

Cultural and Social Setting of Isaiah 2:1-5

Jerusalem was the hub of the Judean economy. Trade in livestock, especially sheep, olive oil, fruit, dairy products, stone quarrying and the three annual pilgrimages to the Temple kept the economy vibrant and provided a tax revenue base. As the capital, Jerusalem was the center of diplomacy. Note Isaiah's frequent rebukes of foreign policy as Israel moved from a reliance on Egyptian military force to pandering to Babylonian envoys.¹⁷ Political intrigue generated concern among the populace as the people reacted to rumors of a potential coup of Syrian and Israelite military attack with fear. Isaiah encourages the people to focus instead on God to find their confidence.¹⁸

¹⁵ King, "Jerusalem (Place)," 764.

¹⁶ King, "Jerusalem (Place)," 764.

¹⁷ Isa. 31:1; 39:1-4.

¹⁸ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39, The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 25.

Major Themes of Isaiah 2:1-5

Among the themes found in the text is restoration. Jerusalem is going to be exalted above all the other mountains around it, forecasting a future that contemporary history argued against this prominence. As history shows, Jerusalem was besieged and captured by the Babylonians and its people marched off into exile. The time would come when Jerusalem's fortune would be reversed, and instead of the Israelites being led away into captivity, all the other nations would be streaming toward Jerusalem. Israel's capital becomes the epicenter of the global diplomatic activity. Jerusalem's status would rise to the point where God elevates the city instead of destroying it, which is the foreboding prediction shortly to follow this text.

Another theme is reconciliation. As the capital of Israel, the Jews will be the primary occupiers. But they will not be alone. Every political entity will make their way to Jerusalem and retain representation there.

Finally, there is the peace theme. All the usual political gamesmanship that characterizes international relationships will be absent. The wonderful predictions of the weapons of war being repurposed for food production make a remarkable contrast to a time in which technological developments are driven by military needs. The reason these weapons are not required is that the need for them will no longer exist.

Word Study in Isaiah 2:1-5

There is no immediate, identical superscription in Micah 4:1-5, but Isaiah 2:1 identifies the prophet and his prophetic word as a unit of divinely inspired communication. Just how this word was manifested is wrapped up in the word "saw."

This pertains to a revelatory ability given to prophets. Vos referred to it as “second sight” or open vision.¹⁹ This word concerned Judah and Jerusalem, with the common link with Micah as has been mentioned above.

The parallel text begins with the phrase “it shall be in the last days.” The RSV notes that this phrase pertains to the age of peace that is to follow the day of the Lord.²⁰ This idea of a terminal point in time is interesting - the plural “days” retains the idea of a definite, extended period of time as opposed to “the day of the Lord” that speaks more of a theophanic event at a specific time. Being aware of the great eschatological debates that swirl around the meaning of this term, and taking into consideration the scope of this paper, the “last days” is taken to refer to the time of the institution of an eternal, divine theocracy.

But even if one adopts such a position, the question remains: when will this happen? From the passage under review, this time will be preceded by “the day of the Lord.” Such is also the understanding of the New Testament. But the problem in the New Testament is the period of peace referred to as “the Millennium” in Revelation 19-20. There appears to be two “days of the Lord.” One will feature Christ defeating the armies gathered by the beast and the false prophet; the other has Christ defeating the nations gathered by the devil who is released from a one thousand-year bondage.²¹ While

¹⁹ G. Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 221. He also argued that Isaiah’s “seeing” was simply “he received.”

²⁰ G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and John T Willis, *Theological Dictionary of The Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 1977), 69. Fourteen references with meanings that connote “general future” as well as the eschaton. Context becomes the determining factor as to which meaning should be preferred, and clearly from the contexts of Isa. 2:1-5 and Mic. 4:1-5 “the last days” refers to the eschaton.

²¹ Rev. 19:11-19; 20:1-10.

believing that there is only one “day of the Lord,” the writer is not able to decide between these, but instead proposes another understanding of “the last days” as being inaugurated by the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, of being “all ready, but not yet.”

The New Testament writers speak of “the last days” as a present reality.²² Daniel, in the Old Testament, prophesied of a redemptive period of seventy weeks in which atonement of sin could be made. The outcome is full restoration. Yet, Messiah is cut off at the end of sixty-eight weeks but confirms the covenant with many at the end of the seventy-week cycle: the work of salvation through the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.²³ Then there are Old Testament promises that were forecast to take place in the last days attested to by New Testament writers.²⁴ Therefore, the end period of which this passage speaks has already been inaugurated with the zenith of fulfillment still in the future.

The following phrase clarifies this position as it relates what is going to happen in the “last days.” The establishment of Zion as God's eternal habitation. In Isaiah, the “mountain” is modified as being the place where the house/temple of Yahweh is located. The participle that is translated “established” has connotations of enduring creation.²⁵ But the parallel with the following verse “and exalted above the hills” produces some ambiguity. Whereas “mountain” and “hill” are synonymous with any elevated ground, translations vary around how to understand the parallelism, though each reading uses the

²² Mk. 1:14; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 2 Pet. 3:3.

²³ Dan. 9:24-27.

²⁴ Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17

²⁵ Cf. Isa. 48:18, 62:7; Jer. 10:12, 33:2; 51:15; Eze. 16:60, 62. See also Gen. 41:32; 2 Sa. 7:16; Ps. 89:37, 93:2; Prv. 29:14.

same rendering for both passages. The Septuagint provides a helpful commentary, if not the solution to this problem. The terms used in both passages refer to the actual mountaintops: Isaiah 2:3 is a generic reference while Micah 4:1 uses “summits.” So, one can interpret the Hebrew prepositional term for “heads” at “upon the mountain tops,” thus understanding the text as saying the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be placed atop the mountain and will be raised above all other elevations. The translators of the New Living Translation offer a fascinating colloquial rendering: “the most important place on earth.”²⁶ Zion will be physically impressive.

Zion will also be the destination of a universal pilgrimage. In the parallel verse Micah reads “peoples” where Isaiah has “nations,” a tendency that continues throughout the whole passage. The term for people usually refers to a general population that is larger than a tribe, but less than a race, and is based on terms of relationships within, or the unity of, the group.²⁷ “Nation,” on the other hand, typically described a defined political or ethnic or territorial population. As a plural, the term encompassed those Canaanite nations surrounding Judah, seed of Abraham, or to uncircumcised nations who worship other gods in general.²⁸ Micah appeals to “peoples” as including to all people groups throughout the earth as witnesses of God's judgment of Samaria and Jerusalem, while nations are politically-organized and militarily-aggressive entities. Differences in usage within the parallel passages are, therefore, a matter of style since the terms can be

²⁶ Some translations and their renderings are: a) as the chief of mountains (NASB); b) as the highest of the mountains (RSV); c) in the top of the mountains (KJV); d) as chief among mountains (NIV: following 1QIsa^a that lacks the article).

²⁷ Botterweck et al, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 676.

²⁸ Isa. 9:1.

used both interchangeably and in parallel. If considerations of context are introduced, one can see how Micah and Isaiah both predict that Gentile populations will come to Jerusalem in such numbers that the verb describing their movements is the metaphor of a great river flowing. *nāhar* is a derived verb from the word *nāhār* meaning river (cf. Jer. 51.44 NASB) and used to speak of the confluence of nations.²⁹ This is a major theme in Old Testament eschatology: the seeking out of Yahweh in Zion by all people on the earth.³⁰

The transition from the third person to the first person in verse three indicates a move into direct speech. The Gentile nations exhort each other to join in the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. An inclusion is formed between the two cohortative verbs that appear in this verse so that the first-person speech embraces the entire verse. The first cohortative is the language of religious pilgrimage “let us go up.”³¹ The second bicolon records the motivation for doing so:

that Yahweh will teach us of his ways
and we will walk in his path's.

This indicates a willingness, if not an eagerness, to be taught by Yahweh. This is further evidence that this age will be quite unlike any other. The Gentiles will understand that their gods are false. They turn to the God of Israel and become a part of the covenant people.³² The turning toward God by the Gentiles severely rebukes the idolatry practiced

²⁹ Botterweck, et al., *Theological Dictionary of The Old Testament*, 560.

³⁰ Isa. 11:10, 27:13; Ps. 22:27, 86:9; Jer. 3:17.

³¹ Cf. Jud. 19:18; 1 Sa. 1:7; 1 Ki. 12:27; Isa. 38:22.

³² Cf. Jer. 16:19; Mal. 1:11; Rom. 11:25.

by the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose privileged position should have made their allegiance to Yahweh more concrete.

A pivotal point in this prophetic passage explains the full significance for the exaltation of Zion, provides the ground for the Gentiles' desire to go there, and allows for an understanding of the motivation of the nations that journey there:

For from Zion shall go forth the law;
And the words of Yahweh from Jerusalem.

The parallelism shows that Zion and Jerusalem to be the same place. The law in this context is to be understood as the pronouncements of Yahweh in much the same way as this prophecy contained in this text. Thusly, the preceding parallel of "ways" and "paths" speak of the direction given in Yahweh's words.

shāpat is not only to be understood as the authoritative functions of an executive office (e.g. Deuteronomy 1:16; Judges 16:31; 1 Samuel 7:16-17), to govern and arbitrate controversies, but that the exhortations. The use of the hiphil stem is used to indicate authoritative instruction by Yahweh (cf. Isaiah 28:6; also Psalm. 119:102; Exodus 4:12, 15).³³

That direction enlightens the lives of those who follow it and seals their trust in God.

Isaiah 2:4 confirms Yahweh's place as the judge of the universe.

Because all true authority is God's and that he shall ultimately act as judge of the world in the last great assize, he is *shōpēt* preeminent (Psalm 96:13; 50: 6; 75:8) and meanwhile through providence is always supreme *shōpēt* (Psalm 94: 2; cf. 103:19) of the universe.³⁴

Equipped with omniscience, God will be truly just and able to fully comprehend all situations that are brought before him. But the dispensing of justice is only one part of this Judge's function. Yahweh is not only the arbiter of disputes but is also the enforcer

³³ Cf. Gen. 18.25. Botterweck, et al., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 947-8.

³⁴ Botterweck, et al., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, pg. 947-8.

of the decisions and rulings. Joel 3:9-16 speaks to the heathen, calling them forth to be militarily chastised as Yahweh displays His omnipotence and recovers his people from where he scattered them. One cannot help but think of Revelation 16:16 and the gathering of the nations at Armageddon.³⁵ The extent of God's sovereignty is made even more explicit as Micah describes God's jurisdiction over nations in the immediate vicinity (or the known world) and those far away (the unknown world).

The presence of perfect justice, irresistible enforcement, the purging of all rebellion, plus a desire to "walk in his path" will eliminate war. The instruments of destruction are turned into utensils of production. International "hotspots" will be a thing of the mortal past. There will simply be no need to go to war.

Isaiah 11:6-9 describes paradise regained. The peace, extended to include nature, is so complete that even the predatory instincts of animals disappear.³⁶ This metaphor is used in a similar context in 2 Kings 18:30ff, where a king offers those under his rule "peace and safety." Sennacherib, while threatening Hezekiah in Jerusalem, promised security and prosperity to those who will accept him as suzerain until he returns to take them into exile. Sennacherib's offer, however, ended with his defeat and his eventual assassination. This case is contrasted with Yahweh in that God's promise is guaranteed by God's absolute sovereignty.

Isaiah's plea in 2:5 is notable through the appearance of the term "house (dynasty)" of Jacob, thus embracing all those are descended through the lines of the

³⁵ Cf. Isa. 25:3; Ps. 2:5-12, 68:30, 31.

³⁶ Cf. Hos. 2:18; Zec. 9:10.

patriarch. The prophet urges those to whom God made great promises to play their part in following God, just as Gentile nations are destined to do.

Conclusion of Isaiah 2:1-5

The Isaiah/Micah prophecy carries tremendous meaning and insights for the New Testament and for the project to be undertaken. What does it mean to be a prophetic preacher? Isaiah's example shows a prophet in the role of a covenant prosecutor, speaking to the people of God about their relationship with God. How does a liberation prophet, as the people's advocate for social (often secular) equality, measure up? Prophetic preaching can speak truth to power, but always in the interests of the larger mission of conforming to God's covenant.

Then one must consider the “altar call” of the vision. What must one do in “the light of the Lord,” which has been revealed to be the irresistible end of all things? The nation's conduct is to adhere to the covenant terms that will attract other nations to Jerusalem.

Of great importance is that the Old Testament theocentric theme of restoration that is transported into the New Testament is to be fulfilled through Christ. The topic of “the last days,” as discussed above, began with the incarnation and the coming of Christ. Zion's exultation is reiterated in Revelation 21:1, 10. But now, Jesus Christ is the co-ruler of the earth. It is Christ's words that will judge the nations and bless those who attend to them. The Gentiles are welcomed into the new relationship along with the Jews through the gospel of Christ, a move that is meant to provoke Israel into accepting the gospel.³⁷

³⁷ Dt. 32:21 and Isa. 65:1; Rom. 10:18-21.

Christ is the great judge who governs the nations. He will take charge of Zion and establish peace on earth. This is the Christological connection on display in Ephesians 2:11-21.

Literary Element of Ephesians 2:11-21

The book of Ephesians is an epistle, or letter, addressed to Christians in the city of Ephesus that lies on the western coast of Asia Minor in what is known today as Turkey. Ephesians is one of the apostle Paul's prison letters (along with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon). Some scholars regard Ephesians as a circulatory letter as the most authoritative early manuscripts lack the words "in Ephesus."

The words *ἐν Ἐφέσῳ* are absent from several important witnesses (𝔓46 *א** B* 424c 1739) as well as from manuscripts mentioned by Basil and the text used by Origen. Certain internal features of the letter as well as Marcion's designation of the epistle as 'To the Laodiceans' and the absence in Tertullian and Ephraem of an explicit quotation of the words *ἐν Ἐφέσῳ* have led many commentators to suggest that the letter was intended as an encyclical, copies being sent to various churches, of which that at Ephesus was chief. Since the letter has been traditionally known as 'To the Ephesians,' and since all witnesses except those mentioned above include the words *ἐν Ἐφέσῳ*, the Committee decided to retain them, but enclosed within square brackets.³⁸

The mainly prose text features an opening greeting, an introduction, a body and a concluding greeting.³⁹

The apostle Paul's authorship has been long debated. One discussion point is the characteristics embedded in the book itself. It reads as a summary of the apostle's

³⁸ Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament, 4th rev. ed. (London: New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1994), 532.

³⁹ "The Letter to the Ephesians," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software.

teaching and the ethical implications arising from it. One theory holds that a collector with a thorough knowledge of the epistle to the Colossians pulled together Paul's letters together with Luke-Acts and wrote Ephesians as an introduction to the compilation.⁴⁰

Bonnie Bowman Thurston notes other differences from what is construed as the genuine Pauline corpus. The longer sentences, digressions from the main topic, lyrics of hymns and liturgical materials are inserted, and other non-biblical religious, philosophic, and literary forms and materials are utilized. The language of Paul is broadened to include new meanings. Theology is expanded to cosmic proportions to show how redemption affects the universe and breaks down the divisions between peoples. Even the nature of the church is expanded. The church is now the body of Christ with Christ as the head and the remainder of the body composed of each member having his or her place.⁴¹

These differences are not enough to prevent moving forward with an interpretive approach that holds the apostle Paul as Ephesians' author writing from prison and its original audience as the Christian in Ephesus and the surrounding region. Variations in sentence length can be simply style changes that take place during an author's life. Digressions are not uncommon in other Pauline literature. The breadth of Paul's education, demonstrated in the discussion with Greek philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens, can explain the use of non-biblical materials. It is a slight for a modern interpreter to undermine an author's authenticity by diminishing that writer's

⁴⁰ Another example of a third-party author theory follows. "Although Paul may not be the author of these letters, they carry his authority. And, more significantly, because they are included in the canon of the New Testament, the church has made clear that they represent apostolic tradition that is binding on Christians, no matter who wrote the works. In short, "pseudonymous" does not mean "false." Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Publishing, 2007), 77.

⁴¹ Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians*, 76.

independence to choose one or more kinds of source material, or not to use anyone. So, too, goes the assumption of the popular notion of a “real” Pauline corpus to measure authorship, which would require a greater discussion than can be pursued here. It is reasonable to say that a traditional view, despite the challenges to the contrary, can claim to be well within the boundaries of possibility.

A similar claim can be made about the development of Pauline theology. There is a common theme that Ephesians shares with the book of Colossians: Christ as the cosmic head of the universe. In Ephesians the cosmic head’s influence on bringing unity among peoples is emphasized.⁴² In Colossians this head trumps all principalities and powers.⁴³ As before, a shift in concept or terminology can be reasonably explained as a development of an idea during a lifetime versus being necessarily the work of other authors.

In approaching the book of Ephesians, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers a point of view that regards hierarchy as dangerous to women. She criticizes the use of empire language and regards such an approach as being hostile and unhelpful. Fiorenza sees wisdom being fulfilled by the work of Jesus Christ. By seizing on a feminine personification of wisdom in the book of Proverbs and exporting it as the hermeneutical governing dynamic in understanding Ephesians, the reading makes a case of gender equality as is presently understood, but not that which Ephesian’s author would understand as his purpose for writing. One could posit that Fiorenza’s point of gender

⁴² “Chief among the elements of incipient catholicism, so far as Ephesians is concerned, is the conception of the church throughout the world as a unity.” Frederick Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 237. Kindle Edition.

⁴³ Col. 2:10, 15.

equality, without re-imagining or re-rendering the text, is subsumed in Paul's case that humanity is equalized in Christ.

Historical Element of Ephesians 2:16-21

Ephesus was a leading Asia Minor city and a center for Christian missionary activity. The city's position at the mouth of the Cayster River made it the most prominent seaport in Asia Minor and its largest city.⁴⁴ Brimming with culture, Ephesus contained gymnasiums, baths, and an impressive theatre. Most notably was the pervasive religious influence. Ephesus was the location of the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World, a source of great Ephesian pride.⁴⁵ Artemis-worship dominated politics and culture with Greek and Roman influences abounding, and with a population drawn from ethnicities from all around the Mediterranean and the Orient, Ephesus was a very much a metropolis.

Later, Ephesus became the home of the apostle John. The church of Ephesus was one of the letter-recipients mentioned in the Apocalypse of John and the site of the Council that met in 451 ACE.

⁴⁴ Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman Empire with many trade routes passing through it as well as many temples devoted to the worship of the emperor, the goddess Artemis, and various other gods and goddesses. Jason C. Kuo, "Ephesians, Letter to the," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ Herbert Lockyear, "Ephesus," in *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 343-345. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986. One of the titles proudly held by Ephesus was that of "temple-warden" to the goddess (Acts 19:35). Eds. F.L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 553.

Socio-cultural background of Ephesians 2:11-21

Ephesians provides a striking socio-cultural setting which goes to the heart of the epistle's message: that the ethnic/racial foundations in the Jewish worldview has been expunged and replaced by a new, universal unity. The population is predominantly Gentile, downgrading the Jewish population to a minority. While Ephesus and Judea are both Roman colonies, Ephesus' importance as a center of trade contrasted greatly with Jerusalem status as an annoying outpost. Roman oppression around the entire region also brought people from many different places to inhabit the city. In both places, Roman citizenship is highly prized. A Roman citizen has access to rights and protections not available to others. Note the social status of the believers and how it included some of the elite citizens with most of their number drawn from the working and servant classes. The presence of the Artemis cult was also accompanied by a popular interest in the occult. Social status in terms of marriage and family is a feature of interest. So, too, is slavery: a deeply entrenched social feature in Ephesian society as it was throughout the Roman world.

Major Themes

Ephesians 2:11-22 expounds on the new creation theme of verse 2:10 in three movements. The first movement heralds the reconciliation of two formerly irreconcilable groups: the gentiles, called “uncircumcision” by those who styled themselves as “the circumcision.” The Semitic practice of male circumcision was adopted by the Hebrews as a sign of the covenant between them and God. It also bestowed on them an exclusive identity. Circumcision distinguished Hebrews from “uncircumcised” nations like the

Philistines, Canaanites, Babylonians and Greeks. Circumcision marked the Israelite nation as God's people.⁴⁶

Greek and Roman culture were hostile toward circumcision. Consequently, Jews were socially ostracized. Greek athletic competitions offered a way to social advancement and fortune for lower-class young men. However, as competitions were conducted in the nude, those who were circumcised were excluded. Since Greek citizenship hinged on successfully competing in athletic competitions, Jews could not become Greek citizens.⁴⁷ Jews who wanted to assimilate into Greek culture in the first century had to contend with Greek anti-Semitism. Others hid their circumcision. Some parents compromised by only removed a portion of their sons' foreskins, trying to strike a balance between a concern for Greek sensibilities and the need to preserve Jewish traditions. Some Jewish males attempted to reverse their circumcision. Rome levied a tax on circumcised Jews. Circumcision was considered a capital offence under Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Emperor Hadrian.⁴⁸

Paul reminds his Gentile readers who were brought up in an anti-Semitic culture of their former alienation from God. He framed their dilemma in Jewish terms, i.e. being outside of the Mosaic covenant and the covenant people, Israel, in verses eleven to thirteen.

A word about the importance of the concept of covenant would be helpful at this point. A covenant is a contractual arrangement that binds parties to conditions and

⁴⁶ Robert G. Hall, "Circumcision," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1027.

⁴⁷ Hall. "Circumcision," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 1027.

⁴⁸ Hall. "Circumcision," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 1027.

obligations. This concept of covenant described the relationship between God and the people with whom God chose to identify. Covenant also progressed through a relationship with Israel to one now established with the church. Covenants were also made between human beings. The covenant in the background of Ephesians is the Sinaiitic covenant, from which the commandments and ordinances which kept Gentiles at bay were sourced. This is the breakthrough brought about by Christ, that the covenant that extended grace to Israel, has been superseded by a new covenant that gives access to God by all people.⁴⁹

Restoration is featured in the second movement within Ephesians 2:11-22: the bringing together of humanity with each other and with God. Those who “were afar off have been brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ.” Christ’s crucifixion outside Jerusalem’s walls overturns the effects of Adam’s fall in the Garden of Eden. A united humanity is once again on friendly terms with the Creator.

The final movement of the Ephesian pericope shows inclusion as an important derivative attribute of the reconciled community. The root cause for division between God and people has been remedied. Another dynamic replaces the former, exclusionary type of relationships in which believers may have been enculturated. Gentiles were not to be regarded in the same manner as those who become Jewish proselytes, who could participate in Jewish rituals up to a certain point. Not so with Christians: every person, regardless of race, is now a fully-fledged, equal member with everyone who believes in Christ.

⁴⁹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Covenant,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 530 – 531.

In addition to the new qualities of restored relationship with God, which was once lost, this passage speaks of God becoming more than just a figure far removed. God is portrayed as a father. While the fatherhood of God speaks first of God's paternal relationship to Christ, it is broadened to include all of creation as well as to believers by styling them as “children of God,” Other references to household motifs in Ephesians such as the church as the bride of Christ, the household of faith, liken of divine relationships to that of a family.⁵⁰

Overshadowing the aspects described above is the one who accomplished this astonishing achievement: Jesus Christ. He is the reconciler of hostile parties, the embodiment of peace and the location of restoration. Prior to verse ten, God is the main actor. Now it is Christ who makes both groups one. Christ breaks down the dividing wall. Christ abolishes the law; Christ creates a new humanity within his body.

Word Study

The word translated “at one time” at the beginning of verse eleven signals a former state that no longer exists.

Ποτέ, at some time or other; once, [is] an enclitic particle with temporal force; referring to the past in John 9:13; Romans 7:9; 11:30; Galatians 1:13, 23 (bis); 2:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:5; Philemon 11; Ephesians 2:2, 3, 11, 13; 5:8, 29; Col 1:21; 3:7; Titus 3:3; Hebrews 1:5, 13; 1 Peter 2:10; 3:5, 20; 2 Peter 1:10, 21; referring to the present in 1 Corinthians 9:7; or to the future in Luke 22:32. Romans 1:10; Philippians 4:10: ἥδη ποτέ, “sometime at last.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009), 1040.

⁵¹ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 141.

Paul lists five privileges from which Gentiles were excluded. They were apart from Christ; just as unbelieving Jews were. Second, they lacked citizenship in the state of Israel. Then Gentiles were in ignorance of the covenant promises God made to Israel. A consequence of this ignorance was having no triumphal messianic hope inspired by those promises. Finally, their ignorance left Gentiles unconnected to the true and living God. Their spirituality rested on counterfeit deities that could not be of eternal benefit to them.⁵²

Verse thirteen points out that something critically important has taken place. A paradigmatic shift is indicated at the beginning of the phrase by the temporal contrast “but now.”

Temporal *vuví* δέ . . . indicates present reality in contrast to a past (or future: Romans 15:25) reality. In the eschatological context of Romans 3:21 it is used of the present situation created by the Christ-event in contrast to the past under the law (cf. 7:6). The aeon has been realized (6:22; Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:22) and is to be put into effect (Colossians 3:8) in baptism. With reference to the ministry of the apostle, *vuví* signals a change in the circumstances of Paul (Romans 15:23, 25; Philemon. 9), his fellow workers (2 Corinthians 8:22; Philemon. 11), or a congregation (2 Corinthians 8:11).⁵³

It is no longer the case that Gentile believers exist under the above conditions. The statement continues with the condition that makes all the difference: “in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”⁵⁴

⁵² “. . . the main point of this passage is that the Gentiles were really in a dire situation.” Harold W. Hoehner, Philip W. Comfort and Peter H. Davids, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, vol. 16 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 54.

⁵³ Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 481.

⁵⁴ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Eph 2:13.

Paul expands the statement more fully: “He is our peace.” The added pronoun intensifies the subject of the verb to greater effect, indicating that Christ is the personification of peace.

εἰρήνη, ης [is] a set of favorable circumstances involving peace and tranquility—‘peace, tranquility’; εἰ ἔγνως ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ καὶ σὺ τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην ‘if you knew in this day those things related to peace’ Luke 19:42; προπέμψατε δὲ αὐτὸν ἐν εἰρήνῃ ‘send him on his way in peace’ 1 Corinthians 16:11. The meaning of ‘peace’ or ‘tranquility’ may be expressed in some languages in a negative form, for example, ‘to be without trouble’ or ‘to have no worries’ or ‘to sit down in one’s heart.⁵⁵

This peace nullifies the conditions mentioned previously.

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people. Lit., ‘for he is our peace, the one having made the both one.’ The text portrays: Christ as the center of peace. In Greek, the personal pronoun ‘he’ is placed at the beginning of the verse for emphasis. This is also supported by the grammatical structure. The anarthrous subject (‘he’) is joined by a copulative verb to an articular predicate (‘the peace’); this construction demonstrates that Christ is the personification of peace.⁵⁶

“The middle wall of separation” alludes one of the ringed barriers surrounding the temple in Jerusalem. This wall represented the no-go area for all non-Jews. It had a warning engraved at every entrance in Hebrew, Greek and Latin saying that to go any further means taking one’s life into one’s own hands. The middle wall would be a very meaningful allusion to Paul because it represented the cause of his circumstances at the time of writing. Paul was imprisoned because of accusations that he had allowed a Gentile into the Jerusalem temple’s alien-restricted premises. The altercation recorded in the book of Acts shows how passionately Jews maintained the exclusion of Gentiles. The

⁵⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996), 246. Another use of εἰρήνη as an object is Acts 12:20 is “reconciliation” (NRSV) where the people of Tyre and Sidon won favor with Blastus, Herod’s chamberlain, to facilitate a settlement between the king and their city.

⁵⁶. Hoehner et al., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, 55.

mere allegation inflamed the mob from which Roman soldiers rescued him. Paul's experience made the middle wall the perfect metaphor for the distinction now being erased in Christ.

Frequent references to “in Christ” or “in him” allude to Christ being a container in which two different compounds combined to form a new substance.⁵⁷ This “one body through the cross” is expanded through other metaphors: a conduit, a building described as a holy temple, the house of God and the dwelling place of God that is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”⁵⁸ Christ is the all-access pass to the Father.⁵⁹

The final move in this passage recites the new membership privileges that Gentiles have with God and share with their Jewish brothers and sisters; and the liberty that so delights the members of RAAME. “So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.” Paul appears to be at pains to make the Gentiles believers feel at home among those who have been raised according to Jewish traditions, have Jewish worldviews and may not have been accepted in Greek society. Paul further insists that Gentiles are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” The teaching and authority of the earliest Christian witnesses applies equally to Jew and Gentile alike, with Christ as the central element. Then Paul continues by explaining how that cornerstone affects the entire building: it is in him that whole structure holds

⁵⁷ Eph. 2:13; 2:15; 2:16; 2:21, 2:22.

⁵⁸ Eph 2:20.

⁵⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to Colossians, to Philemon, to the Ephesians. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 301.

together. Without Christ the benefits of faith are void, would not become a reality nor will make sense. And the effect of this new membership is that as the number of believers grows, the entire believer-ship will become a holy sanctuary constructed to indwelt by God. The Apostle concludes with a parallel verse that once again affirms that Gentiles and Jews are included in this building, now described as being indwelt by God via the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Ephesians elaborates on the amalgamation of humanity foreseen by Isaiah/Micah by showing Jesus Christ as the agent of that reunification. Through his redemptive activity Christ embodied humanity within himself, reconciled its factions with himself and presented this reunited humanity to be successfully reconciled with God. In this we can see the solution of human conflict over their differences: a solution that will not favor one tribe over another. Unity is found where all peoples stand on equal ground before their redeeming Creator in an environment void of the will to-power. This is the basis for the reconciliation project in RAAME: the solution to human conflict is Christ.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Methodism has been called the most transformational movement in Protestantism since the Reformation under Martin Luther. This paper explores the beginnings of African Methodism on the island of Bermuda and the ascendancy of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a denomination that styles itself as “a liberating and reconciling people.”

The exploration starts by briefly touching on the beginnings of Methodism in England and follows the movement across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States. Then, what became known as African Methodism in the United States, headed north to Canada. This is a critical step because African Methodism made its way to Bermuda through Canada. An account of African Methodism’s origin in Bermuda, with a brief excursus about its spread to South Africa, will detail how the movement arrived on its shores through the visit of Bishop Willis Nazrey, then shifted away from the Canadian brand to the United States brand in 1884, during the age of imperialism.

Main Body

Methodism and Great Britain

Methodism begins with John Wesley. John and his brother Charles were the leading lights of the renewal movement. Born in the Epworth rectory to Samuel and Susanna Wesley, John and his siblings were brought up under the devout and intellectual influence of their mother, who took charge of the children's early education. One of the remarkable events of his childhood was being rescued by their neighbors from a fire that blazed through the Wesley's home in 1709. A frequent Wesley quote, "plucked as a brand from the fire," served as a testimony from his past and a moniker for Methodism as it moved throughout Great Britain.

John followed his father Samuel's academic footsteps to Oxford University. It was there John took an interest in religious pursuits beyond that which was regarded as normative for Oxford. Together with youngest brother Charles and others, what was derisively called alternatively "The Holy Club" and "Methodists" was formed. While at Oxford, he pursued ordination in the Anglican church which led to him volunteering to go to the American colony of Georgia as a missionary.

His journey across the ocean brought him into contact with German Moravians who were on their way to the new colonies in the Americas. Their calm and prayerful demeanor during the stormy events of the voyage left an impression on John which led to his own conversion. John later became a chaplain in the state of Georgia. Brother Charles and he came ashore in Georgia on February 6, 1736. Their stay was short lived; Charles would be gone within a few months and John in less than two years. One of the earlier

signs of adapting the methods of spreading of the gospel was displayed in him learning to speak Spanish in order to preach to the Indians who had been educated by Catholic priests. Wesley attempted to minister to the African population as well. Heitzenrater writes that there was no evidence to the success of this endeavor, but when Wesley fled Georgia as a result of charges being brought against him for not properly handling the administration of church affairs, that one of his delights was that he had “taken steps toward publishing the glad tidings to both the African and American heathen.”¹

Upon his return to England in 1738, Wesley discovered that the work begun in Oxford began to spread throughout Britain. One agent in this expansion was George Whitfield, who was preparing for the first of his seven voyages to America just as Wesley had come back. A Welsh revival under Griffin Jones and Howell Harris began in the 1730s. Spurred on in his search for assurance of faith, Wesley became part of a group called the Fetter Lane Society that met for the purposes of spiritual formation.

But it was Charles’ sudden experience of a spiritual breakthrough that further stressed Wesley in his own search. But he did not have to wait long: only three days.

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Apostle to the Romans. About a quarter before 9, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warm. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.²

Spurred on by his experience, Wesley set about preaching. He first preached in churches that would receive him, then in other societies in London and Oxford. Finding obstacles

¹ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley And The People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), Kindle Edition, Location, 1395.

² Heitzenrater, *Wesley And The People Called Methodists*, 1549.

with the Church of England, Wesley began to preach in the fields. Whitfield invited Wesley to Bristol, which became the site of a great revival. The salvific experiences of so many people required an organization to meet their needs. Wesley's gift for organizing began to flourish as societies banded the converts together.

Methodism and America

One act vividly demonstrated Wesley's acumen. It was Wesley's edge of organization that caused him to send ministers to buttress Methodism in America and stoke its tremendous appeal. The measure also compensated for the feelings of those who were in North America as regards to rule of Britain. Wesley was very much a loyalist, but he had sympathy towards the cause of the colonists. Francis Asbury was one of the preachers Wesley sent to minister in the United States. Growth in Great Britain was steady; in North America Methodism grew larger in a shorter space of time. The mid-Atlantic states were especially active with Methodists. And from the very beginning, persons of African descent gained membership in the societies that were formed. On December 24, 1784, Methodism was organized at what has been appropriately called the Christmas Conference at the Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, Maryland. Asbury was elected and ordained a deacon, an elder, and consecrated a Bishop on successive days. Other notable persons in attendance were two men of African descent: Harry Hoosier and Richard Allen.

Allen was born on February 14, 1760. He was a slave to Benjamin Chew of Philadelphia. Chew was an attorney and a magistrate who eventually became Chief Justice of colonial Pennsylvania. After his birth Allen was sold into Delaware along with

his parents and three other siblings. The new master was Stockley Sturgis who's farm was in the Delaware River Valley. At seventeen-years old Allen was converted in a revival near the Sturgis home. He later described the experience as "my Dungeons shook, and my chains fell off." Right after his conversion he entered a manumission agreement with Sturgis and began to work toward his freedom. It took him six years to achieve his objective. During that time Allen begin to diligently attend his Methodist class meeting and became one of the preachers in the Methodist community of Delaware.

Allen found great liberty in the practice of Methodism. His devotion also found expression in his ability to be a spokesman against slavery. He earned his freedom in August 1783 and took the surname Allen. From that day on became his own man. His story became an example of self-empowerment for the abolitionists in Pennsylvania.³ He was invited to preach at St. George's church in Philadelphia in February 1786. From then on Philadelphia became his home. He apprenticed himself as a chimney sweeper. The respect that accompanied him as a free African businessman allowed Allen to acquire the status as a leader in the African community. Within a year, he built a society of forty-two persons of color at St. George's Church. In April 1787, Allen partnered with Absalom Jones to establish the Free African Society that was dedicated to community action and self-empowerment.⁴

³ Richard S Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, The AME Church, And the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, London: New York University Press, 2008), 46.

⁴ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 60.

Methodism and Philadelphia

Then came the event that was most significant in Allen's ecclesial life. Tensions rose among the white members within St. George's as the number of African worshippers increased. The seating arrangements were adjusted to reflect the prejudice in the current social order. Allen recounts the incident:

A number of us usually attended St. George's Church in Fourth street; and when the coloured people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall, and on Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door, and told us to go in the gallery. He told us to go, and we would see where to sit. We expected to take the seats over the ones we formerly occupied below, not knowing any better. We took those seats. Meeting had begun, and they were nearly done singing, and just as we got to the seats, the elder said, 'let us pray.' We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H-- M--, having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off of his knees, and saying, 'You must get up--you must not kneel here.' Mr. Jones replied, 'wait until prayer is over.' Mr. H-- M-- said 'no, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and I force you away.' Mr. Jones said, 'wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more.' With that he beckoned to one of the other trustees, Mr. L-- S-- to come to his assistance. He came, and went to William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church.⁵

Now estranged from St. George's, the exiles needed to find a worship space. Their forays would be constantly resisted by the leadership of St. George's. The question became centered on which denominational path to follow. Some persons' taste for Methodism was forever soured. These persons followed Absalom Jones to the Episcopal Church and St. Thomas African Episcopal Church located on 5th Street between Walnut and Locust streets was founded. Others like Allen agreed to stay within Methodism. And by the summer of 1794, the former blacksmith shop that was used for their place of

⁵ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (Locations 132-142). Kindle Edition.

worship was transferred by mules to Sixth and Lombard Streets. This edifice was dedicated on July 29, 1794 in a service attended by Bishop Francis Asbury. This is the sanctuary that became known as Bethel.⁶

Steve Klots, a minister, scholar and researcher of African American history, made a fascinating claim about the church's new name.

The church was named Bethel, a Hebrew word meaning 'the house of the Lord.' The name was suggested by the Reverend John Dickins, the elder of St. Georges, and taken from a biblical verse [gen.28:19] that reads, 'he called the name of the place Bethel.' Dickins himself offered the dedication prayer – that the church 'might be a bethel to the gathering in of thousands of souls.'⁷

A series of legal disputes over the course of two decades plagued Bethel until Allen could have the church fully unencumbered from the oversight and intrusion of hostile denominational leaders. Allen sought to create a legal identity for Bethel, so it could remain a Methodist Church and have Methodist preachers administer the sacraments. He required a constitution written up under the auspices of the Methodist Conference. A white elder offered to write the document for him, adding that Bethel's property would be legally secured. The resulting Articles of Association of 1796 gave considerable authority to white officials. Allen accepted them, believing that this would secure Bethel's legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the government.⁸

However, the white Methodists used their authority to harass Allen and Bethel as the congregation prodigiously expanded.⁹ Rev. James Smith came to Bethel in 1805,

⁶ Known now as Mother Bethel, this is a historical landmark by the U.S. National Parks Service.

⁷ Steve Klots, *Richard Allen: Religious Leader and Social Activist* (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990), 42-43.

⁸ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 132.

⁹ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 171.

demanded the keys and forbade any meetings in his absence. Allen considered this act as a breach of the Articles of Association. Attempting to reassert authority over their breakaway congregation, Allen drew up the African Supplement in 1807 that repudiated white control over Bethel and its affairs.

A lawsuit was decided against Allen in 1815 in favor of one of the original trustees, Robert Green. Green claimed that Allen's dismissal of him as a trustee was unlawful. On its face this case appears to be about an internal church conflict. The longer historical view sees it as a further attempt by white elders to control Bethel. Although Allen lost the case, he gained a victory in that Bethel was regarded as an equal, legitimate legal entity.¹⁰

The struggle continued as white clergy operated on the assumption that African congregants were to be subject to them. In April 1815, the Reverend Robert Roberts attempted to preach at Bethel without trustee approval. He was physically blocked from entering the pulpit. After consulting their lawyers, the white Methodist officials ignored the African Supplement and attempted to sell Bethel out from under Allen in a sheriff sale on June 22, 1815. Allen, however, managed to become the highest, and successful, bidder.¹¹

The final battle for Bethel's independence began as the Reverend Robert Burch declared that he would preach at Bethel at the invitation of Robert Green, the estranged trustee. On December 31, 1815, Burch arrived at Bethel to find the church crammed with people, with benches and chairs being barricading the aisles. A Bethel associate, Joseph

¹⁰ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 160.

¹¹ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 164-166.

Tapisco, was delivering a sermon from the pulpit. Allen was not present. Waiting for the sermon to conclude, Burch tried to speak to the congregation from the doorway. He was shouted down. Burch did not press his advance further but left the premises.

This was the provocation required to pursue legal action. The next day, January 1, 1816, Burch, along with the Methodist Conference, filed suit in the state supreme court for control of Bethel's pulpit. The court ruled in Bethel's favor, and with that decision Allen had finally secured Bethel's independence.¹²

On the heels of the court's decision, Allen and other African Methodists from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware met at Bethel on April 9, 1816 to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Neuman commented: 'this would be the first independent black denomination in Pennsylvania (Peter Spencer's African Union church in Delaware actually achieved independence a bit earlier). Over the next century, and the church became the single most important black-led group in North America and one of the largest religious denominations in the Atlantic world. The AME church also had the honor of ordaining the first black Bishop in western history: Richard Allen.'¹³

It is to be understood also, given the circumstances of its origin, how the AME Church's personality has been shaped out of its experience of slavery in North America. The institution proved to be robust in the formation of the United States. It was a question behind the arrangement of the constitution and the Electoral College. It was the foundation of the wealth of the country, especially in the South. The impact of slavery and racial discrimination is the predominant issue behind the African Methodist Episcopal Church's theology, polity and praxis from its beginning.

¹² Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 168-169.

¹³ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 173. Daniel Payne wrote that the first item of business following the resolution to form the A.M.E. Church "... was the election of a Bishop. The votes being polled, Rev. Daniel Coker was declared the Bishop-elect on the 9th of April, 1816. On the 10th he resigned, or rather, declined the office, and Rev. Richard Allen was chosen in his stead, and was therefore consecrated the Bishop of the A.M.E. church on the 11th of April, 1816." Daniel Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, ed. Rev. C. S. Smith (London: FB&c Ltd., 2018), 14.

Methodism and Canada

From its beginnings in Philadelphia, the AME Church expanded throughout the United States. The church weathered the American Revolutionary War and assisted with the defense of Philadelphia during the war of 1812. Its deep involvement in the uplifting of African people permitted the church to play a prominent role in the Underground Railroad by which slaves escaped the South for freedom in the North. There were several regulatory impediments that made that enterprise risky. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 (revised in 1850) gave legislation force to Article 4, section 2, clause 3 of the United States Constitution. The clause made it obligatory for a person under servitude fleeing one state to be returned to that state.¹⁴ Another impediment was the Dred Scott decision where the Supreme Court declared that Congress could not prohibit slavery in the states.

A significant piece of influential legislation was the Slavery Emancipation Act that abolished slavery in all British territories effective August 1, 1834. African Americans crossed over the border of Canada to gain their freedom. There they established communities and churches. A history of the British Methodist Episcopal Church narrates the development of Canadian African Methodism:

In or about the year 1834, certain ministers of God's word of the A.M.E. church, United States, came over to Canada and preached the gospel among that portion of the colored settles there who were of the Methodist persuasion. They also united them in classes and formed societies. About 1838, the societies had increased so rapidly that Bishop Brown, of the A.M.E. Church before mentioned, and certain other ministers of the gospel in conjunction with him, came over and organized an Annual Conference under his control, known as 'The Canadian Annual Conference.' In a few years it was found to be very inconvenient to be subject to a foreign bishop and discipline; and therefore, in 1856, a memorial

¹⁴ "No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due." http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/tocs/a4_2_3.html.

from the Canadian Annual Conference was sent to the General Conference of the A.M.E. Church, setting forth the disadvantages under which the Canadian church labored, and praying for the privilege to withdraw from the said A.M.E. Church; this memorial was granted by a very large majority; and arrangements were made with the General Conference before mentioned, for the organization of a distinct, separate and independent church in Canada, and accordingly, on the 29th day of September, 1856, the ministers and delegates of the before mentioned societies in Canada, met in convention in their chapel, in the town of Chatham, Ont., and did constitute an organized and independent church, to be there after styled and known as 'The British Methodist Episcopal Church,' and the convention did at the same time adopt the Episcopal form of church government and the articles of religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church as given by the Rev. John Wesley, and did also unanimously elected Rev. Willis Nazrey (a regularly ordained bishop of the A.M.E. Church in the United States, but having settled permanently in Canada), General Superintendent of the British Methodist Episcopal Church; said Rev. Willis Nazrey having been ordained a Bishop on the 13th day of May, 1852, in the city of New York, U.S., by Bishop Quinn, who had been ordained a bishop by Bishop Brown, who is also ordained a bishop by Bishop Allen, the said Rev. Richard Allen being seventeen years an ordained minister, by Bishop Asbury, of the M.E. Church, was on the 11th day of April, 1816, in the city of Philadelphia, U.S., solemnly set apart for the Episcopal office by prayer and the imposition of the hands of five regularly ordained ministers of the gospel, one of whom was a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church, who was then, and continued to be in good standing, under the diocese of Bishop White, of Pennsylvania. The convention being fully satisfied with the validity of the Episcopal ordination of Reverend Willis Nazrey, unanimously received him as their General Superintendent.¹⁵

Three points of interest rise from Daniel Payne's account of this convention.

There was the behavior of the delegation sent by the AME General Conference to observe the Canadian convention. S. Smith, A.R. Green and E. Weaver were instructed, according to Payne,

to come here to learn first what are the wishes of the Canadian churches, etc. Now, when men are sent by any body, civil or ecclesiastical, to another of the same kind, to learn its will, they are not sent to dictate to it.¹⁶

¹⁵ W.T. Minter, compiler. *The Doctrine and Discipline of the British Methodist Episcopal Church*, 4th Edition (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), 11-13. Winks believes the motivation for forming a separate church was that "they would be safer from the effects of the Fugitive Slave Act if they became British citizens and were protected by an entirely Canadian-based organization." Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 356.

¹⁶ Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 374.

The U.S. delegation had been very vocal during the proceedings and by the sixth day had worn out their welcome. A.R. Green was set to dispute a point before the minutes of the previous day were read. After attempts to reason with Green failed, the vice-president Thomas Stringer “said pointedly,” recalls Payne:

The delegates had been received and treated with the courtesy that was due to them as representatives of the mother Church; that their unkind and dictatorial spirit had been born with by the convention because they came from that Church, and how did they come from any other they would not have been born with them. This settled the matter.¹⁷

Then there was an issue over the name “African.” Some Africans married Canadian wives. There was no desire to carry the name African in the title of the church to be formed north of the border.

A third item of interest was the Twenty-Third Article of Religion. John Wesley included in the supremacy of the president and Congress in the Articles of Religion for the Methodist Episcopal Church that were sent with Asbury. The Canadians posited that they should have an Article that reflected British law and government. Eventually the following Article was adopted:

We acknowledge Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, as our rightful sovereign, possessing supremacy over all the British Empire as it exists in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, North America, South America, the West Indies, and other islands of the ocean, and over the governor-general and provincial parliament of Canada. we also believe that new foreign potentate should exercise authority within the boundaries of her vast dominions, and inasmuch as British law throws the broad shield of equal protection over the life, the liberty, and the personal happiness of all its loyal subjects, without regard to the clime in which they were born, or the color of their skin, therefore we believe it's our duty ever to pray that the most high God make the reign of Her Majesty peaceful, prosperous and happy; that every member of the royal family may be wise, holy and useful; and

¹⁷ Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 376.

that the British Empire may continue to increase in power and prosperity so Christ himself descends to reign on earth.¹⁸

Methodism and Bermuda

Could this Article have attracted the attention of Africans living in Bermuda to the BME Church? In early Bermuda history, church life was dominated by the Anglican Church. Methodists were not welcomed by that body nor the government. A famous story tells how Methodist missionary John Stevenson was jailed for preaching without a license from the Anglican church or the church of Scotland. Despite being incarcerated in St. George's town jail, Stevenson continued to preach to the audiences of mostly black Bermudians who would gather in the street outside his jail cell window. Stephenson would leave the island a year later.¹⁹ Other missionaries set to build the work of Methodism, and while they pressed their outreach to African Bermuda, the controlling odor of the white oligarchy continued to penetrate sacred spaces, as it did with everything else in Bermuda.²⁰ Early Methodism did give African Bermudians the opportunity to govern their own religious affairs. On November 17, 1827, the Cobb's Hill Wesleyan Methodist Church was dedicated. This structure was built during slaves' free time (on

¹⁸ Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 376.

¹⁹ D.W. Johnson, *History of Methodism in Eastern British America Including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Bermuda From the Beginning till the Consummation of Union with the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches in 1925*, https://archive.org/stream/historyofmethodi00johnuoft/historyofmethodi00johnuoft_djvu.txt, 349.

²⁰ The oppressive attitude of the Bermudian white minority is reflected in the comments of a former Attorney-General in a speech to the House of Assembly in 1904. "I think the sole reason we have representative institutions in this company and have not gone the way of a great many sister colonies is due to the fact that we are not a democratic country. We are an oligarchy.... At any rate there is nothing like, and I hope there never will be, anything approaching adult suffrage or manhood suffrage in this country." Ira Philip, *Freedom Fighters: From Monk to Mazumbo* (London: Akira Press, Ltd., 1987), 4.

moonlit nights and holidays) with the support of sympathetic white Bermudians.²¹ Was the idea of an independent black Methodist alternative that was British so alluring? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that Bishop Nazrey received an invitation to the island and not any of the United States AME prelates.

An article appearing in an anniversary journal of St. Paul AME Church recounts the introduction of African Methodism to Bermuda:

In the year of our Lord, 1869, in the month of August, the Reverend R.R. Morris, secretary of the Nova Scotia District Annual Conference, by the request of the Rt. Revd. Willis Nazrey, Bishop of the B.M.E. church, wrote to the following named brethren; Benj. Burchall, St. Georges; William B. Jennings, Devonshire; and Charles Ratteray, Somerset, respecting the formation of the Nova Scotia conference and its boundaries, viz: (Nova Scotia conference).

It was necessary that the Church should be established and the brethren consulted, how the matter should be brought about, after several communications, the Bishop was invited to visit the island. Having accepted the invitation, he appointed April 1870 as the time to see the friends of Bermuda, according to appointment, he left New York City, per Steamer 'Farkee' enroute for Bermuda, after a pleasant voyage of 4 days he arrived at [redacted], [sic] highly impressed with the islands and its inhabitants. The reception he met is indescribable, [sic] much praise is due as well as gratitude to Reverend Temple Tuttle and Rogers, pastors of the Wesleyan Churches, for their kindness shown to the Bishop, during his stay, [sic] their churches were offered and their pulpits given for his use. The people flocked in crowds to listen to the Bishop and during the 18 days he was upon the island, he delivered 15 addresses and sermons, Etc [sic].

His labours being so well approved and his object being noble, that the people readily consented to be organized and to have a minister from the Nova Scotia conference if possible. The Bishop left the Shores [sic] of Bermuda, with many earnest prayers ascending in his behalf. He attended the Nova Scotia conference and proclaims [sic] the glad tidings of this journey, to the brethren, send up a same time, some brother will have to go to Bermuda, finally when the time for the rise of the conference arrived and the appointments of the ministers, R. R. Morris was appointed to the Bermuda mission.²²

²¹ Cyril Packwood and C. F. E. Hollis Hallett, eds. *Edward Fraser: From Slave to Missionary* (Bermuda: National Museum of Bermuda Press, 2012), 28.

²² Anniversary Journal of St. Paul A.M.E. Church, 1949, Hamilton, Bermuda, 15-16.

Nazrey's visit marked the formation of committees whose purpose was to organize the Bermuda church. The article records the following:

At the meeting held by the above committee with Bishop Nazrey on April 28th, 1870, the following were appointed as parochial committee members: St. Georges, Messrs. Benjamin Burchal[, and] John Burgess; Hamilton, [Messrs.] Benjamin Hill, Sr.[, and] Thomas Furbert; Smith's, [Messrs.] Benjamin Paynter [, and] Thomas Basden; Devonshire, [Messrs.] W.B. Jennings [, and] William Robinson; Paget, [Messrs.] Esau Simmons [, and] Henry Lightbourne; Warwick, [Messrs.] George deShields[, and] Samuel Tacklin; Southampton, [Messrs.] William Perinchief[, and] William Lightbourne; Somerset, [Messrs.] Charles Ratteray [, and] W.A. Swan.²³

The committees began to plant congregations throughout the island. The development of congregations cannot be tracked because sources are not available. However, by the Annual Conference of 1885, the Committee on Missions was able to report:

We find that our Mission work in these islands presents a fair degree of progress: a progress that will compare favorably with the other religious denominations at these islands, some of which are our seniors by a century or more. The progress has been made amid difficulties, discouragements, strong opposition and embarrassments of various kinds. When we think of these things we feel profoundly thankful to Almighty God that we still exist as a denomination here, with the future which seems to promise us greater results. We have six appointments in this conference, five of which had been filled during the last year. we have three churches and one in the course of erection in Shelly Bay. Your committee recommends the following arrangements of the work for this conference here. That Flatts, Warwick, Paget, Port Royal and Somerset be attached to Hamilton and be known as the Pembroke Mission. That St. George's, and Tucker's Town be attached to Bailey's Bay, and be known as the Baileys Bay Mission, and that Crawl remain as it is.²⁴

²³ Anniversary Journal of St. Paul A.M.E. Church, 1949, Hamilton, Bermuda, 15-16.

²⁴ Report of the Committee on Missions, ed. M. C. Brooks, *Minutes of The First Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for the Bermuda District* (Chatham, Ontario: The Banner Printing Company, 1885), 8.

Bishop Charles Spenser Smith's historical account that appears in the Minutes of the Twentieth Session of the Bermuda Annual Conference (AME) continues the story of BME activity.

The Bermuda Annual Conference of the British Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in Hamilton, May 12, 1873, by the Rt. Rev. Willis R. Nazery [sic]. The Rev. H.T. Bell was the Secretary. Rev. R.R. Morris, Rev. Geo. J. H.T. Bell, Rev. G. F. J. Irving were the itinerant preachers; M. G. Jennings, D. Burchall, local preachers, constituted the membership of the conference. The Rev. R.R. Morris was named the Assistant Superintendent. He who for many years the leading spirits have a conference in the colony of Bermuda[sic]. He subsequently joined Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and became prominent as the founder of its Sunday School department.²⁵

The minutes of this and subsequent BME Annual Conferences have not been found. However, Bishop Smith provides some details about these meetings:

The second session of the conference was held in St. Georges [sic] June, 1874, the Rev. R.R. Morris presiding. He also presided over the third session, which was held at Crawl, June, 1875, and over the fourth session, which is held at Hamilton, June, 1876. The fifth session, which was held in Hamilton, May, 1877, was presided over by the Right Rev. Richard Randolph Disney; he also presided over the sixth session at Bailey's Bay, May, 1878. If the records are correct, the seventh session was not held until May, 1881. It was held at Hamilton, May, 1881, and was presided over by the Rev. J. H. Buckner, who also presided over the eight [sic] session, at Crawl, in 1883. The ninth session was held at Hamilton, May, 1884, and was presided over by the Reverend C. W. Dorsey. This was the last session of the Bermuda Annual Conference of the British Methodist Episcopal Church, as in that year the British Methodist Episcopal Church reunited with the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Two facts to note at this point. Nazrey passed away August 22, 1875 in Chatham, Ontario in Canada. Born in the Isle of Wight, Virginia on March 5, 1808, Nazrey was elected a bishop in the AME Church in 1852. He moved to Canada shortly after his election, serving as a bishop in the Canadian and U.S. conferences from 1856-1860. On

²⁵ C.S. Smith, compiler. "Historical," *Minutes of The Twentieth Session of the Bermuda Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church held at St. Paul, Hamilton, Bermuda, April 30th to May 4th, 1903* (Halifax: Holloway Brothers, Printers, 1903), 15.

May 17, 1868, at the request of the BME Church, Nazrey resigned from the AME bishopric and served out the rest of his life exclusively as a BME bishop. He was succeeded by his assistant, the Rev. Richard Randolph Disney on September 2, 1875.²⁶

Disney began to work toward reunification with AME Church because the BME mission work was a strain on the denomination's finances.²⁷ The AME church approved a proposal for "Organic Union" on 1880. The move was ratified at a BME General Conference in Hamilton, Ontario in 1881. The AME General Conference that met in Baltimore, Maryland voted to approve the merger in 1884.²⁸ Richard Wright notes that no new bishops were elected that year, but that Disney was appointed by that General Conference to "the Tenth Episcopal District (Demerara, South America, Bermuda, Ontario, and Nova Scotia Conferences) the same conferences that came out of the BME Church. He organized all these conferences in September 1884 under the AME Church."²⁹

There was dissent within the BME ranks over this reunion. J. William Lamb says that most Ontario churches and clergy wanted to hold on to a "distinctive identity,"

²⁶ R.R. Wright, "Bishop Willis Nazrey," *The Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, AME Sunday School Union: 1963, 257-260. *The B.M.E. Book of Discipline* 1892 puts Disney's consecration date as Sunday, November 21, 1875. W.T. Minter, compiler. *The Doctrine and Discipline of the British Methodist Episcopal Church*. 4th Edition (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), 13.

²⁷ J. William Lamb, "Disney, Richard Randolph," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/disney_richard_randolph_12E.html.

²⁸ The vote was 106-5 in favour of the union, over the objections of Bishop Daniel Payne. "The Proceedings of the General Conference," *The Christian Recorder*, May 29, 1884.

²⁹ R. R. Wright, "Bishop Richard Randolph Disney," *The Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 160. "That reunion took place at Chatham, Ontario, where, in 1851, the separation had taken place," says Charles Smith. C. S. Smith, compiler, "Historical," *Minutes of The Twentieth Session of the Bermuda Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church held at St. Paul, Hamilton, Bermuda, April 30th to May 4th, 1903* (Halifax: Holloway Brothers, Printers, 1903), 15.

adding that they may have felt that the Caribbean churches had overly-influenced the decision to reunify.³⁰ This dissenting group met in Chatham in 1886 to hold an ecclesiastical council and later that year re-formed the BME Church. This following excerpt is the counter-narrative that appears in the BME Church's 1892 *Book of Discipline*.

In A.D. 1880, Bishop Disney begin negotiations looking toward 'Organic Union' between the BME and the A.M.E. church of the United States. The said negotiations and agitations grew into such gigantic proportions that it finally resulted in the dropping of Bishop Disney's name, and the severance of all his relations with the BME church. See committees [sic] report there with attached as unanimously adopted by the General Conference, sitting in the town of Windsor Ont., A.D. 1886.³¹

The committee report follows:

Whereas, We [sic] your committee appointed on the Church Relationship of the Right Rev. Randolph Disney, former Bishop of the British Methodist Episcopal Church, do hereby erase his name and ignore his authority, and cancel his official relationship as Bishop of the British Methodist Episcopal denomination, for the following reasons:

1. For false statements made by him to the St. Louis General Conference of the AME church, saying that the BME people were anxious and ready for union with the AME.
2. For entering a lawsuit against his own church and people because they wish to maintain their rights and secure their property.
3. For not accepting the offer made by the High Court of Chancery, which offered to put him back in the Church as a BME Bishop. He refused.
4. For not attending the BME General Conference after seeing the notification of the time and place of sitting.
5. For holding an AME conference in one of our BME Churches on or about the time that our General Conference was in session. Also after the High Court of Chancery had declared that there was no union between the AME and the BME Churches, Rev. Disney went and held conference in behalf of the AME church on our property and in our property in the Bermudas.

³⁰ J. William Lamb, "Disney, Richard Randolph," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2003), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/disney_richard_randolph_12E.html.

³¹ W.T. Minter, compiler, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the British Methodist Episcopal Church*, 4th Edition (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), 13.

From the above facts we deem him withdrawn from our church and authority, and therefore drop his name and official relation accordingly.³²

Did the liberating AME Church commit an act of ecclesiastical imperialism when it drew Bermuda into its fold? The term arises from an ideological dispute between two factions led by the Pan-African expansionist Bishop Henry McNeil Turner and Senior Bishop Daniel Payne. Turner saw the merger as an opportunity to broaden the scope of the AME Church and unite the darker races of the world under its banner, while Payne thought it to be an attempt for personal gain by persons on both sides of the merger as well as a being an intrusion on the sovereign rights of other territories. A supporter of Payne, an American clergyman ministering in Dominica named James Holly, termed the expansion “ecclesiastical imperialism,” and with that phrase labeled the enterprise as colonization by another name.

Looking at the debates of the period may help shed some light on this discussion. The hot topic at that time was African American emigration to Africa, for which there were both advocates and opponents in the AME Church. Lawrence Little reduced the issue’s outcome this way:

For most AME leaders and members, the question of African emigration came down to matter a political choice. Fight racism at home or leave home and fight racism abroad. Most choose to fight for liberty at home.³³

³² W.T. Minter, compiler. “Report of Committee on Church Relationship,” *The Doctrine and Discipline of the British Methodist Episcopal Church*, 4th Edition. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), 14-15. The reconstituted BME Church still considered Bermuda as part of their church, noting “On Friday, July 9th, 1886, the Conference also elected Rev. Robert Miller, for many years a regularly ordained elder, to superintend the South Americas, West Indies and the Bermudas for eight years.” W.T. Minter, compiler. “Report of Committee on Church Relationship,” *The Doctrine and Discipline of the British Methodist Episcopal Church*. 4th Edition. Toronto: William Briggs, 1892, 15.

³³ Lawrence Little, *Disciples of Liberty: the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 75.

Emigration's twin was evangelism. Little mentions the uptick in AME home and foreign missionary activity in the Reconstruction Era, describing it as a way for African Americans to show that they were equally, and in some situations uniquely, capable of spreading the gospel around the world as anyone else in that they were already doing so.³⁴ He goes on to articulate the tricky relationship that AME leaders had to navigate with respect to America's expansionist foreign policy at the time. This was the period of the Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War, the American Indian wars and the annexation of Hawaii. Commenting on the simultaneous denunciation and projection of American values, Little comments, ". . . [L]eaders of the AME Church condemned American action and simultaneously promoted missionary and economic opportunities for African-Americans that those actions presented."³⁵

One example of AME expansion outside the United States is the case of South Africa. Tensions between black South Africans and European denominations and missionary agencies caused the formation of independent African groups.³⁶ One such group, the Ethiopian church, sought to remedy their situation by joining with the AME Church. As the connection between continental Africans and African Americans began to grow, cultural exchanges began to take place. The Fisk University singers toured South

³⁴ "Members of the AME Church such as Bishop Cain asserted that with "proper general superintendence and the means and material furnished," Africans and others were capable of carrying forward the great work of mission" and managing their own affairs. Many AME leaders believed they could provide the "proper" help and, as people of color, were singularly capable of bringing Christianity to the people of color of the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia." Lawrence Little, *Disciples of Liberty: the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2000, 81.

³⁵ Little, *Disciples of Liberty*, 75.

³⁶ One dispute was the failure to ordain black South Africans to higher church positions. One person served as a probationer for ministry for thirty years.

Africa and created a great sensation wherever they went. The black South Africans noted with admiration the poise, the command of the English language and the ease of social interaction with whites South African which their American counterparts displayed and credited these attributes to their education. In this they saw their route to being able to contend as equals in their culture and establish themselves as an independent church.

An invitation was delivered to the United States proposing a merger with the AME Church. Bishop Turner was sent to South Africa where he speedily ordained numerous South African leaders, launched the implementation of AME polity and structure, and promised financial assistance from the United States. When he returned to America, Turner was heavily criticized for not following the proper process for ordination. Subsequent American bishops sought to stabilize the development of African leaders in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*. They also formed a relationship with the South African government, who regarded the AME Church as a steady agent for black South Africans in their subservient status. However, the promised funding did not materialize as the black South Africans hoped.

Then Bishop C.S. Smith was assigned as prelate over South Africa. His tenure was marked by a very negative attitude towards many black South African leaders. His handling of their affairs, as well as the delay in promised funding, caused many of the early leaders to leave the denomination. The resulting demand for a new style of leadership was eventually answered by the arrival of Bishop Gibbs. Gibbs was able to restore confidence in the AME Church by residing in South Africa, respecting local leadership and making funding available.

What of the AME expansion to Bermuda? The minutes of the BME Church's conferences are not available. The minutes of the first AME Annual Conference have two references to this issue. A statement appearing at the top of the first page under the title "Minutes of the First Session of the Bermuda Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" reads:

Whereas, the AME and BME church have been united under the name and title of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, therefore the above named [sic] Conference commenced its deliberations in the Temperance Hall, Crawl, Hamilton Parish, on Thursday, May 7th, 1885, at 11 a.m. Right Rev. R.R. Disney, Presiding Bishop, assisted by Bishop J.P. Campbell, D.D., LL.D.³⁷

The second reference is contained in the perfunctory salute to episcopal leadership offered at the conclusion of the Annual Conference.

Moved by Bro. Trott, seconded by Bro. Richardson, that a vote of thanks be tendered to Rt. Rev. R.R. Disney and Rt. Rev. J.P. Campbell, D.D., LL.D, [sic] for the interest manifested and put forth by them conjointly to establish the working principles of the AME church in our Island home. the motion was put to the house by the Presiding Elder, and carried unanimously. It was responded to in the most appropriate manner by the bishops.³⁸

There is no record of a discussion on the merger. No debate. No vote. But, whatever the motivation, the AME Church beachhead in Bermuda was firmly established. Local men were ordained, and congregations were developed.

The role of the AME Church and the influence of its American clergy can be illustrated through the pastorate of Rev. Joseph Gomez. Rev. Gomez was appointed by Bishop C. S. Smith to Bethel AME Church, following the pattern of U.S. clergy being

³⁷ Brooks, *Minutes of The First Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for the Bermuda District*, 3.

³⁸ Brooks, *Minutes of The First Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for the Bermuda District*, 7.

appointed to the larger, more well-established congregations.³⁹ The congregation grew in number. Rev. Gomez became the first man of colour to head the Interdenominational Alliance in Bermuda. He also thwarted a government attempt to seize Bethel's property. After several years he was transferred to Canada and went on to become the sixty-seventh elected and consecrated bishop in the AME Church in 1948.⁴⁰

Conclusion

This discussion has traveled with Methodism from its beginnings in England, its voyage to America and caravanned across the U.S./ Canadian border before sailing down to Bermuda. This religion of the heart as well as the head is very attractive to persons who wanted to sense a real connection with God and caught fire wherever it travelled.

Methodism has also had a social impact. First, Richard Allen's need to elevate himself and his people from the humanity-stripping institution of slavery was driven by being an equal member of the body of Christ with every other human being. Then, Philadelphians asserted their equality with their white Methodist colleagues. The Canadian church sought to carve out a separate identity from the U.S. church. African Bermudians flocked to hear a bishop who looked like them. South Africans were inspired to fight for education and, consequently, equality.

Note the way Bermudians imported foreign solutions for local problems. However, these foreign solutions also exposed Bermuda to the cultural forces that shaped

³⁹ The leading church in the Bermuda Annual Conference, St. Paul A.M.E. Church in Hamilton, Bermuda, received its first Bermuda-born pastor, the Reverend Dr. Wilbur (Larry) Lowe, in 1977.

⁴⁰ See the account of Rev. Gomez's tenure in Bermuda in Annetta L. Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God: The Life of Joseph Gomez, a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, the Kent State University Press, 1998, pages 51-68.

those solutions. One example was the introduction of the US military based in Bermuda in the 1940s, which irrevocably changed Bermuda culture and impacted race relationships in a major way. As the present discussion shows, socio-ecclesiastical intervention has had a similar effect.

Yet, with all those accomplishments behind him, Richard Allen looks back over his life and makes an amazing statement in his reflections. He says of Bethel, “This house of worship has been favored with the awakening of many souls, and I trust they are in the kingdom both white and colored.”⁴¹

Would it be a fair to say that while Richard Allen’s concerns about the quality of life of his people, his belief in the ideals that America so firm that he would join in its defense and eventually resisted the suggestion that Africans leave America and set up an independent state elsewhere, that there was another (or perhaps higher priority) in his heart? Could that desire be one where any person of whatever stripe could enjoy the benefits of being co-heirs with Christ, and that his hard-won, independent African church could play an important part in that great enterprise? Yes. As important as the liberation of the African was to Richard Allen, the advancement of the Kingdom of God was the greater imperative. This is the larger vision in which liberation is to serve. This is an important question given the present global growth of the AME Church with new congregations in India and Brazil being added to those already existing in Canada, the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean, South America and the African continent. The reconciling cause of the kingdom of God must be the greater cause.

⁴¹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (Locations 210-211), Kindle Edition.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The question is whether a Bermudian African Methodist Episcopal congregation can be a catalyst for racial reconciliation? If the answer is in the affirmative, as the memo of the AME Church purports it to be¹, then is there a theological basis for it?

This paper argues several theological grounds. One argument can be made, ironically, in an examination of the Black theology position argued in *Liberation and Reconciliation* by African American theologian James Deotis Roberts contrasted to that of James Cone. I adopt this approach because I had nowhere else to go. I have tried to find Bermudian theological sources to draw from, but with little to no success. As the AME Church in the United States embraces Black Theology, it makes sense to begin there. Therefore, after tracing the life stories of these two thinkers, I highlight some key aspects of systematic theology that have some bearing on reconciliation.

Another ground lies in the direction to which Roberts' arguments point: the historic Christian premises developed on the African continent. These durable values continue to shape the theological foundations of the African American church and, in turn, the African-Bermudian Church. The work of Thomas Oden showcases Africa's influences on global Christianity.

¹ “A Liberating and Reconciling People.”

The final ground springs from the character of the context: the lived experience of a people who were formerly slaves in the British Dependent Territory of Bermuda. If experience is a key component to theological reflection along with the Scripture, tradition and reason, as our North American colleagues mentioned above will insist, then the Bermuda experience is a critical component in prosecuting the present topic. Attention will be taken of how their politically maturing descendants lived as a majority together with an economically dominant white minority on an isolated island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Life under the sovereign rule of a distant monarch, with some local autonomy, in the world's wealthiest African majority country, makes some important contextual differences between Bermudians and our North American colleagues.

Dr. James Deotis Roberts

Roberts was born on July 12, 1927. He attended Johnson C. Smith University, Shaw Divinity School and Hartford Seminary, before earning a Ph.D. in philosophical theology in 1957 from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Roberts has taught at several institutions around the world, such as Howard University, Yale University, Duke University, Houston Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States, and the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Roberts has also served as the fourth president of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta Georgia. He was the first African American president of the American Theological

Society and is the author of several books, but most notably the one that is in focus for the purposes of this paper.²

David Goatley described Roberts as one of the first generation of African American theologians.³ Walter Strickland, calling him “the balanced theologian,” credited Roberts’ schooling in historically black institutions in the United States and learning centers in Europe for providing the broad base that informed his work as a theologian. In commenting further on Roberts’ influence in the theological world, Strickland described Roberts’ approach to theology as being eschatologically based, saying to the militant young people of the 1960s era that protesting the oppression of the day is appropriate but must be done in light of the in-breaking of God’s Kingdom, just as the Christian scriptures teach.⁴

Roberts’ advocacy of non-violent reconciliation was a counterpoint to the position of his fellow faculty colleague at Howard University, the more well-known James Cone, who is considered the father of Black theology. Cone’s more radical theological posture with its Black Power attributes held greater appeal to militants and activists. Currently, Cone’s view represents the predominant view in Black Theology. Roberts disagreed with Cone, however, proposing that any Christian position that only polarizes the various

² James Deotis Roberts, “Walk Together Children: A History of the Interdenominational Theological Center,” http://digitalexhibits.auctr.edu/exhibits/show/itc_history/presidents/roberts. Roberts served as ITC president from 1980 to 1983.

³ David Goatley, *Black Religion, Black Theology: The Collected Essays of J. Deotis Roberts* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2003), 4.

⁴ Walter Strickland, “The Balanced Scholar: The Life and Work of J. Deotis Roberts,” Filmed October 14, 2016, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxqW-HQ8Fuc&t=1119s>.

camps falls short to a higher Christian ethic. Roberts' view is that the gospel is both liberating and reconciling.

Goatley believed that Roberts is under valued for several reasons. His first reason is that Roberts spent so much of his time in historic African American institutions that did not grant Ph.D. degrees in theology. He did not supervise doctoral students whose theological development would have been shaped by his influence. As a result, there are few of the following generations of theology or religion professors who employ his methodology.⁵

Goatley also asserted that "Roberts' entire career was oriented as a theologian in service of the church."⁶ While being very committed to the Academy call, Roberts was very much more inclined to how the Academy functioned in service to the church and its mission to further the Kingdom of God.

Goatley's more provocative reason for Roberts' underappreciation highlights Roberts' "personal disposition . . . [being] more interested in service than in personal promotion and self-aggrandizement."⁷

Those who take the path of service for the sake of service and refused to promote themselves often are destined to be considered less seriously than they should be. Roberts is the proverbial gentlemen and the scholar. Those who are impressed by shock value and superfluous rhetoric miss the import of those who speak with a sometimes subtle substance and astute analysis. This does not suggest that Roberts is easily dismissed. What it does suggest, however, is that one must be interested in depth and breadth to comprehend and appreciate the kind of theology done by Roberts.⁸

⁵ Goatley, *Black Religion, Black Theology*, 5.

⁶ Goatley, *Black Religion, Black Theology*, 5.

⁷ Goatley, *Black Religion, Black Theology*, 5.

⁸ Goatley, *Black Religion, Black Theology*, 5.

Dr. James Hal Cone

On the other hand, James Cone is lionized in African American theological circles. Cornel West's funeral tribute to him is an excellent example of the regard in which Cone is held:

My dear brother, James Cone. Words fail. Any language falls short. Yes, he was a world-historical figure in contemporary theology, no doubt about that. A towering prophetic figure engaging in his mighty critiques and indictment of contemporary Christendom from the vantage point of the least of these, no doubt about that. But I think he would want us to view him through the lens of the cross and the blood at the foot of that cross. So, I want to begin with an acknowledgment that James Cone was an exemplary figure in a tradition of a people who have been traumatized for four hundred years but taught the world so much about healing; terrorized for four hundred years and taught the world so much about freedom; hated for four hundred years and taught the world so much about love and how to love. James Cone was a love warrior with an intellectual twist, rooted in gutbucket Jim Crow Arkansas, ended up in the top of the theological world but was never seduced by the idols of the world.⁹

The A.M.E. Church acknowledged his passing in the following manner.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church celebrates the life, work, and legacy of Dr. James H. Cone. Dr. Cone's theological purpose and project were to challenge the theological idolatry of white supremacy while encouraging the Black Church to be "unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian . . . Both he and his brother, Dr. Cecil W. Cone, Jr. grew up in the AME Church in Arkansas and were ordained itinerant elders in the AME Church. The Cone family's commitment to the AME Church was a faith, family and freedom affair. They loved their church enough to never leave it. They chose to challenge their church to keep Richard Allen's Dream alive by speaking and writing the truth in love. The Cones were proud to be AME members and the denomination was richly blessed by their contributions.¹⁰

⁹ James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian* (Kindle Edition), 2018. Cone died on April 28, 2018, shortly after he completed this memoir. West's comments appear in the memoir's foreword.

¹⁰ African Methodist Episcopal Church, "The Transition of James H. Cone," Press Release from the Council of Bishops, April 30, 2018, <https://www.ame-church.com/news/the-transition-of-james-h-cone>. In his memoir Cone did acknowledge his debt to the AME Church but insisted that he would never serve as a pastor under bishops who had "no genuine system of accountability." James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*, Orbis Books, Kindle Edition, location 667.

Cone's timely and valuable account describing his vocational journey is a very generous gift to anyone writing about him. It is appropriate to lean on this resource as a brief exploration reveals how Cone came to write *Black Theology & Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), to which Roberts responded with *Liberation and Reconciliation* in 1971.

Cone wrote that after becoming a black graduate in theology, earning a doctorate and a faculty position, the civil unrests of that time affected him deeply because the theology he learned did not speak to the suffering experience by African Americans.

When the Detroit rebellion, also known as the '12th Street Riot,' broke out in July of 1967, the turmoil woke me out of my academic world. I could no longer continue quietly teaching white students at Adrian College (Michigan) about Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and other European theologians when black people were dying in the streets of Detroit, Newark, and the back roads of Mississippi and Alabama. I had to do something. But I wasn't a civil rights leader, like Martin Luther King Jr., or an artist, like James Baldwin, who was spurred in his writing when he saw the searing image of a black girl, Dorothy Counts, surrounded by hateful whites as she attempted to integrate a white high school in Charlotte, North Carolina (September 1957). I was a theologian, asking: 'What, if anything, is theology worth in the black struggle in America?'¹¹

Cone set out to find his own voice and, with encouragement from persons like C. Eric Lincoln, began to work on appropriating Black Power in a way that would give theology relevance to African Americans. Cone did not consider the church to be very helpful in this regard, sharing one of his philosophical fathers, James Baldwin's religious rebelliousness. Impelled by the "black fire burning inside me . . . demanding expression,"¹² Cone began to see his calling as an academician writing from the perspective of black power rather than that of a pastor. He defined black power as:

¹¹ Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 339.

¹² Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 339.

. . . that self-determination of black people in every area of their lives by any means they deem necessary. No one outside of the black struggle for justice could tell us what we could and couldn't say or do to get our freedom. Not even Negroes.¹³

He began to trust his own experience “as a better source for knowledge about God and Jesus” than what he deemed to be white theologies that could not recognize their own complicity with white supremacy. Although Cone himself acknowledged the dangers of an enculturated theology, he still felt justified to pursue one.¹⁴

The first book was *Black Theology and Black Power*. In it Cone argued that black power was the political liberation of black people by any means necessary, that the gospel of Jesus Christ was defined in God's incoming Kingdom encompassed by the life teachings and death of Jesus; and that black and white churches failed to fully preach the gospel because they were too concerned with institutional survival.¹⁵

While *Black Theology* was a polemic against white racism and black self-hatred, *A Black Theology of Liberation* was written for the academy in order to lay out his case for doing theology according to the experience of black people in the United States. In his memoir Cone pointed out four areas of weakness in this work: sexism, Third World exploitation, classism and reliance on European neo-orthodoxy.¹⁶

¹³ Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 353.

¹⁴ Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 379.

¹⁵ Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 759.

¹⁶ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Kindle Edition, location, 206.

Robert's Response in *Liberation and Reconciliation*.

In the preface to the 1994 edition of *Liberation and Reconciliation*, Roberts told his own story. He said that there was no need to see his views as being a strong reaction to Cone's position or his own personal response to Cone radicalism. "There were basic differences or agreements between us," he says,

but you would miss the point of the differences if you only looked at the response of the book as being something against Cone: the acknowledgement that there were forces at work that drove both of their work period you talk how they were in conversation that each other period and how they worked together in drafting statements. And both were interested in racial justice.¹⁷

Roberts grew up in the era of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools. That decision impacted his work as a black theologian. He also labelled his personal journey as epistemological. From the perspective of the history of ideas, Roberts examined the issues being presented by the black religious experience and that his involvement with religious scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic undergirded his ability to do so.

As Roberts prepared to state his case, he offered some general thoughts on theology. He thought that theology was still in need of a greater sensitivity to the masses of oppressed people, that black theology must be a theology "from below," and that it had to stay loyal to the black church. Secondly, the balance of liberation and reconciliation would be essential in a pluralistic society. Reconciliation could not just be a sentimental coming together, but a process that required repentance, forgiveness, and cross bearing. Then, Roberts saw the need for black theology to address the global human audience. The

¹⁷ J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2005), xii.

use of inclusive language would show sensitivity to the insights offered by feminist and womanist theologians. One intriguing connection that Roberts makes is that womanist and male theologians might dedicated some attention to the black family. It was important for the theology to address the situation and the condition of the black family. Finally, there needed to be a theology of ministry for the black church. Therefore, Roberts says that the work of black theology must inform the way ministry is done and how it impacts social justice.¹⁸

Roberts' response to Cone begins with whether there should be such a thing as a black theology, which he affirmed. The dilemma these theologians faced was that they were black faces in a white society. That choice was not made by them. It was their reality. So, Roberts felt that they should be free, then, to interpret the black experience as a source for theology but at the same time give a "helpful interpretation" of the Christian faith in order to be "their true Black selves and Christian at the same time."¹⁹

The second chapter presented "the options before the black community and the nation."²⁰ He challenged the views of black separatists and the ethics of the belief that in order to achieve liberation by any means necessary, violence was an acceptable option. Then, there were blacks who desired to be united with whites through a gospel based on eschatology that dealt in the future only and that did not deal with the realities of the here and now. It was from this vantage point that Roberts asserted that the gospel balanced

¹⁸ "In this way, the role of the black church as a place of worship will be expanded to include social and political action as well. In this way the secular and the sacred will meet." Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 29.

¹⁹ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 2.

²⁰ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, xii.

both liberation and reconciliation; and it was a part of the black church's mission. The model of reconciliation where a dominant culture makes concessions to a lesser one is rejected in favor of reconciliation that was based on both cultures being respected as equals. Chapter three starts with the African experience of the United States and their push for freedom and justice. Chapters four, five and six dealt with the doctrines of God, anthropology, and Christology. Chapter seven focused on hope. Chapter eight dealt with the historical context of the period and attempted to address the challenge of "by any means necessary" ethic that was being advocated at the time

Roberts posits that, however they undertake their project, black theologians must recognize that there is an inbuilt ethic within Christianity. Therefore, they would be obligated to abide by that ethic while doing their theology. They could not excuse themselves from that ethic based on the moral hypocrisy of white Christians.²¹ In taking one further step beyond the maintenance of their Christian ethical obligations, Roberts felt that black theologians' efforts would present an opportunity to think about God and black experience in conversation with other (i.e. white) theological partners and not in self-imposed isolation. The need for communication was also crucial to Roberts because the grave racial plight of African Americans made their actions a matter of life and death.²²

Black theology was meant to show both blacks and whites' failure to live "authentic" Christian experiences with respect to race.

²¹ Roberts. *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 2.

²² Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 22.

Whites have ignored the requirements of ‘love, justice, and mercy.’ They are guilty of malpractice as Christians; they have been hypocritical and involved in double dealing in the area of race. Words and deeds had been antithetical. Dishonesty and indifference had been common among whites even integrated congregations and denominational bodies. White Christians had been living and behaving thus in an unauthentic manner. Black Christians who have passively accepted the blunt end of the misinterpretation and malpractice of white Christians have also lived an unauthentic existence. It is the goal of a worthy Black Theology to lead both Blacks and whites to an authentic Christian experience.²³

Listen to Roberts’ solution.

The true life of faith should be for whites one that would enable them to accept all humans as equals to themselves. Black Christians are to be led to true self-understanding, self-respect, to personhood, and fulfillment as children of God. Because it is a liberating as well as a reconciling theology, it combines meaning with protest. Confrontation, empowerment, and development programs may be the means whereby Blacks will move to an authentic life. Therefore, not only the existential posture, but the ministry of Black Power may figure in the theological reflection upon the black experience. Authentic life for Blacks is a movement through liberation to reconciliation. Authentic life for whites is a movement through humaneness to reconciliation.²⁴

Liberation and reconciliation are the two poles of black theology. They are not antithetical - one moves naturally from one to the other due to the Christian understanding of God and humanity. The use of the words “liberation” and “reconciliation” was deliberate. Roberts acknowledged the Marxist tone of the term liberation, but insisted that what blacks were seeking was to have that which the Declaration of Independence proposed:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.²⁵

²³ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 7.

²⁴ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 7.

²⁵ Thomas Jefferson, “The Declaration of Independence,” https://www.monticello.org/declaration/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw5MLrBRClARIAPG0WGzN8eZCpo5ijrr06IoeFc_ETRYrqj7C5IqlqBc94gl9q_YpXU_XaTH4aAjnbEALw_wcB.

Not seeing these grand ideas apply to them required a revolution (i.e. the Marxist critique and the use of the term “liberation”). Roberts held that the Christian faith was sufficiently revolutionary to achieve that self-actualization.

Reconciliation spoke of the outcome gained by liberation. Roberts recalls Martin Luther King’s concern about choosing between chaos or community. The polarizing of the races must be of concern to those writing black theology in that having peace in coexistence would be threatened by the white anger that raged against the disregard for law and order on one side and black anger turning toward the separatists on the other. Roberts acknowledged that some persons would be very negative about this thrust for reconciliation and criticize its advocates that such a stage was too futuristic and too “pie in the sky.” Roberts’ answer was that as a Christian he was always compelled to live life by faith, and one had to rely on the scripture and 2 Corinthians 5:19 where God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

These were the observations of Roberts about Cone. Cone, in response to Roberts, said:

What J. Deotis Roberts criticized was my endorsement of Black Power, which he regarded as un-Christian, violent, lacking any interest in reconciliation with whites. It was not that I wasn’t interested in such reconciliation, but I felt that first we must speak of black liberation, without which reconciliation had no real meaning. How could blacks be reconciled with people who act in ways that deny their humanity?²⁶

Roberts has indeed shown the way forward.

²⁶ Cone, *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody*, 1356.

Systematic Theology

Two points are to be made before moving to talking about limbs of systematic theology. The first assumption is that the primary point of departure for theological discourse is the canonical scripture. The second assumption introduces the aspect of tradition. In noting the African influence in forming the Christian intellectual tradition, Thomas Oden asserted:

Africa played a decisive role in the formation of Christian culture. Decisive intellectual achievements of Christianity were explored and understood first in Africa before they were recognized in Europe, and a millennium before they found their way to North America.²⁷

Oden continued:

My task [in writing this book] is to show that the classic Christian mind is significantly shaped by the African imagination spawned on African soil. It bears the stamp of philosophical analyses, moral insight, discipline and scriptural interpretations that bloomed first in Africa before anywhere else. The seeds spread from Africa north. The term Christian mind points to Christian intellectual history. This includes the history of literature, philosophy, physics and psychological analysis. The term African mind points to ideas and literary products produced specifically on the continent of Africa.²⁸

The discussion so far shows Roberts pulling black theology back into the orbit of Christianity and the black church, away from the religion of black power. Home base for the black church is the long tradition of Christianity that has already been strongly influenced by African experience. While legitimately employing African American experience to do theology, Roberts falls back toward an African-influenced Christian tradition that is un-warped by white racism and is captured in the base beliefs of the black church.

²⁷ Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Kindle Locations 42-44), Kindle Edition.

²⁸ Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (Kindle Locations 50-53).

Other writers are attempting to do just that. Elizabeth Sung's review of J. Kameron Carter's *Race: A Theological Account* singles out one effort:

[Carter's] study promises to narrate the theological origins of 'race' discourse. Since 'race' has compromised Christian theology, Carter proposes an alternate course for its future.²⁹

Carter begins to lay a foundation for his case that whiteness (i.e. European hegemony) is a theological problem. Consider his comment on the reach-back to early African thought:

The prelude, interlude, and postlude then point out the degree to which this early Afro-Christian theological imagination, as discussed in part III, is in keeping with Christian theological sensibilities that actually predate it and that predate, one might say, the medieval theological mistake that set in motion the intellectual and social processes of the racial production of the human.³⁰

Here is an illustration of Carter's method.

The prelude explores what was at stake in the second-century struggle by theologian Irenaeus of Lyons against ancient Valentinian Gnosticism's denigration of Christ's flesh—indeed, its denigration of the material order of creation and embodiment. His struggle against ancient Gnosticism, I argue, is analogous to the antebellum Afro- Christian effort, as I isolate it in the aforementioned texts, to reckon with race generally and with whiteness particularly as theological problems. Irenaeus's struggle against the Gnostics' protoracial outlook pressed him to reclaim Christ's humanity as made concrete in his Jewish flesh as a central feature of both Christian identity and the theological imagination. That is to say, Irenaeus's reclamation of Jesus' Jewish flesh caused him to reimagine how theology functions as a discourse or as an intellectual enterprise. Herein lies his significance as an anti-Gnostic intellectual: his theological sensibilities foreshadow those of the nascent Afro-Christian faith.³¹

Sung's scrutiny of Carter's method yields this observation:

This monograph breaks new ground, beginning with construing 'race' as a theological problem. The argument is made by ascribing the invention of race to Kant (not itself a new claim: Robert Bernasconi, 'Who Invented the Concept of

²⁹ Elizabeth Sung, A Review of *Race: A Theological Account* by J. Kameron Carter, *Themelios* 40, issue 1 (April 2015): 156.

³⁰ J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford University Press, 2008), Kindle Edition, 7.

³¹ Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford University Press, 2008), Kindle Edition, 7.

Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race,' in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi [Oxford: Blackwell, 2001], 11–36), by showing that Kantian thought is conditioned by Christian categories (especially supersessionism), and by tracing, in several writings, the theme of white superiority. Carter's compelling interpretation calls for revision of the ordinarily positive assessment of Kant's view of humanity.

The study also is original in its interaction with postmodern theorizing and cultural criticism, contemporary black theology and black religious scholarship, and historical theology (patristic and antebellum African American writers). Carter's broad knowledge and facility in drawing comparisons and distinctions between past and present thought-patterns is impressive.

Carter's analysis of texts otherwise unknown to many theologians, highlighting the counterhegemonic use of Christological reasoning in reflection by Afro-Christians U.S. writers, is valuable. They bear out his larger argument that theologians neglect such works by non-white writers, to their detriment.³²

Reconciliation and the Attributes of God

In considering a theology of God, Cone's perspective is, "The point of departure of black theology is the biblical God as related to the black liberation struggle."³³ Two hermeneutical considerations are involved here. The first one relates to the mutable and immutable character traits of God revealed in Scripture. The second relates to God's activity – the liberation on behalf (and positioned on the side) of the oppressed. Cone doubled down on the view that unless this liberating aspect is missing from theological consideration, that theology is a denial of biblical revelation.³⁴

³² Elizabeth Sung, A Review of *Race: A Theological Account* by J. Kameron Carter, *Themelios* 40, issue 1 (April 2015): 157.

³³ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* - Fortieth Anniversary Edition. Orbis Books. Kindle Edition, 1356.

³⁴ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1356.

Like Cone, Roberts regards the principal matter of God in Black Theology to that of theodicy. In understanding the problem of God, Roberts conflates God theology with that of anthropology and eschatology, arguing a theology about God's goodness³⁵ is linked to the "dignity and destiny of human beings."³⁶ One example is the attribute of the omnipotence. Roberts argued that omnipotence is critical to how a black person would regard God's goodness: what benefit would goodness be if God was impotent?³⁷ God is the God of Daniel, Hananiah, Michael, and Azariah, the One who can deliver those who trust in Him.³⁸

Another aspect of God's goodness is the zealous care for the dignity of all human beings. God's revelatory message addresses the specific aspects that pinpoints the diverse conditions in which those human beings find themselves. God's revelation to blacks is the revelation of Black Power, which brings dignity, black pride self-respect and the determination to control their destiny.³⁹

Added to the above, Oden links the attributes of God with reconciliation.

[A]lthough God's holiness detests sin, the motive of reconciliation is God's love for the sinner, which is so great that it is willing to pay the costliest price to set it aright. Yet in Christ, finally 'Mercy triumphs over judgment' (James 2:13).⁴⁰

³⁵ Goodness is defined as "the disposition of God to deal generously and benevolently with all his [sic] creatures." John J. Davis, *Handbook of Basic Bible Texts: Every Key Passage for the Study of Doctrine and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 32.

³⁶ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 37.

³⁷ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 44.

³⁸ Dan. 1:6.

³⁹ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 39.

⁴⁰ Thomas Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992), 125.

The doctrine of God is important, but not exclusive, to black theology. Both theologians are addressing people's helplessness in the face of oppression. Roberts's position on God being almighty finds a supporting voice in Oden's condensed patristic opinion on the subject.

After the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. (sic) and its subsequent activity, everyone thought it utterly impossible that the course of history would reverse and their land would be returned to them. Under these oppressive conditions, Jeremiah affirmed his confidence that "There is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17, KJV). Having spoken of how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, Jesus, when asked who could be saved, similarly affirmed the boundless power of God: "For men this is impossible; but everything is possible for God" (Matt. 19:26). Nothing that God conceives and wills to do is beyond God's ability or power to accomplish (Augustine, *On the Creed, Shorter Treatises, LF*, pp. 563ff.; Calvin, *Inst. 2.7.5*).⁴¹

Reconciliation and the Person of Christ

All views accept the centrality of Christ in theology. Cone acknowledged the importance of the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ as he focused Black Theology on what Jesus Christ means to the oppressed. His principal problem was that white theology misappropriated Jesus to their advantage.

The history of Christendom, at least from the time of Constantine, is a history of human enslavement; and even today, white 'Christians' see little contradiction between wealth and the Christian gospel.⁴²

His solution was to be an apologist for Albert Cleage's *Black Messiah*, which he called "the most meaningful Christological statement in our time." Then Cone makes the most astonishing claim: "Any other statement about Jesus Christ is at best irrelevant and

⁴¹ Oden, *The Living God*, 75.

⁴² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2381.

at worst blasphemous.”⁴³ For Cone, Jesus is black. He means that Christ identified by the oppression experienced by black people and, by being recognized as such, Jesus showed that oppression had been overcome.

Roberts cut a middle road between particularism and universalism. He accepted the black Messiah only as a symbol. But he refused to surrender his view of the incarnation.⁴⁴ He expressed sympathy with efforts of indigenize Christ in places affected by a version of Christianity that smacked of racist Eurocentric cultural superiority and saw Black Theology as a legitimate process in this respect. Roberts credited the influence of his teachers about the location of his Christology when he stated that “the frame of reference is the black Messiah, the context will be the “Jesus of history as the Christ of faith.”⁴⁵

Cone seemed to ignore the African influence on Christology during the three centuries prior to Constantine in order to leap ahead to the attitudes of white Christians in North America. His posture appeared to repeat the same error Oden attached to European theologians:

Where was this prejudice against Africa manufactured? How could these distortions have happened? How could such widespread developments be overlooked? The most distracting voice was that of Adolf von Harnack, the leading liberal German historian in the 1890s and early 1900s. He argued that the decisive failure of ancient Christianity was its accommodation to Greek philosophical language and assumptions. Along with Harnack the core of the nineteenth-century German liberal tradition-Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl and Ernst Troeltsch-did battle with what they regarded as the regression of Christianity into Hellenistic abstractions and dualisms. This is a prejudicial argument that both Catholics and evangelicals regrettably have continued to buy

⁴³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2381.

⁴⁴ “I do not support the view that Christ is actually black in a literal-historical sense.” Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 72.

⁴⁵ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 72.

into for several decades since it became obsolete. Major participants in Euro-American theology seem to have thus missed entirely the literary richness of the distinctive African Christian imprint on proto-Europe and the formation of the Christian mind. These mistakes have been passed on through the graduate studies programs that have formed scholars of all continents subliminally. Sadly, this dubious legacy still lives on in Africa.⁴⁶

This legacy appears to be reflected in Cone's comments. Using that "any other statement" phrase, he divested black theology from the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Creed and other global historical statements that were shaped by African intellectuals. Oden added:

The Christian leaders in Africa figured out how best to read the law and prophets meaningfully, to think philosophically, and to teach the ecumenical rule of triune faith cohesively, long before these patterns became normative elsewhere.⁴⁷

Roberts retained the Christological position that springs from the historic formulations.

While other scholars continued up on the quest for the 'historical Jesus' and as they continue the 'new quest,' the black theologian's quest is for the black Messiah, the Liberator of black people, the Reconciler of humans to God and to each other. our search has led us to our situation. Others will find the Messiah in theirs. In the end we long for the universal Christ, who will not generally set us free but will bring us together.⁴⁸

Roberts quotes Bishop Joseph A. Johnson, Jr. as he closes out his chapter on the black Messiah:

The people of all races, because of his service, are able to identify with him and to see in his humanity, a reflection of their own images. Today the black man looks at Jesus - observes his ministry of love and liberation and considers him the black

⁴⁶ Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Kindle Locations 447-453), Kinde Edition.

⁴⁷ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 225-226.

⁴⁸ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 81.

Messiah who fights oppression and sets the captive free. This is precisely the black Messiah.⁴⁹

Reconciliation and Atonement

The key theological element in reconciliation is the atonement. Oden declared:

At the heart of the divine-human reconciliation is Christ's death (Rom. 5:10; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 2:9-14), which means the cross (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20), which means the giving of the lifeblood of Christ (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12, 15; 1 John 1:7). Christ's atoning work is grounded in the Father's love (John 3:16). It manifests God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21). It forms the basis of our reconciliation with God and neighbor (Rom. 5:11; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, FC 49, pp. 309-15).⁵⁰

Oden capsulized the idea of atonement this way:

Christ suffered in our place to satisfy the radical requirement of the holiness of God, so as to remove the obstacle to the pardon and reconciliation of the guilty. What the holiness of God's required, the love of God provided in the cross.⁵¹

For both Cone and Roberts, the value of the atonement was weighted less on its mechanics and more upon its effect. The church was the tangible evidence of the Kingdom of God on earth, Cone believed.

As Harvey Cox puts it, *koinonia* is 'that aspect of the church's responsibility . . . which calls for a visible demonstration of what the church is saying in its *kerygma* and pointing to in its *diakonia*.' Thus the Church, by definition, contains no trace of racism. Christ 'has broken down the dividing walls of hostility' (Eph. 2:14). That is why Karl Barth describes the Church as 'God's subjective realization of the atonement'.⁵²

⁴⁹ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 82.

⁵⁰ Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life, Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992), 348.

⁵¹ Oden, *The Word of Life*, 349.

⁵² James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, Orbis Books. Kindle Edition, 1667.

Roberts transported much of the importance of the atonement into a person's experience with the cross.

No one can fully understand the revelation of God if he or she does not know the meaning of the cross, not merely as unmerited suffering but also as a healing balm. . . . The black person shoulders a cross at birth and never emerges from its burden. It is an existential cross. . . . In an understanding of the cross from the vantage point of black consciousness, the black person experiencing the revelation of God through the black Messiah bears an existential cross.⁵³

Through the existential cross a person interfaces with spiritual and material tensions.

Carrying the cross may be for the black Christian a bittersweet experience. It is bitter because it is burdensome; it is heavy. The cross involves suffering, shame – even death. But the cross is also revelatory of the love of God - of 'love divine, all loves excelling.' It is through the window of the cross that we see the face of God. And the God who is revealed through the cross is just, righteous, and loving – mighty to save.⁵⁴

The atonement's crucial role can be seen in the background of both Cone and Roberts' formulations. Neither thinker devoted much detail on how the atonement functioned, but both heavily relied on its outcomes as they, in turn, fixed an ideal role for the church and Roberts fixed the foundation for reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Hamartiology

Cone utilized white oppression as a synecdoche for sin. Oppression becomes the scourge to eradicated. Oppression defines the rightness or wrongness of people (and theological positions). It is only in the liberation from oppression that the cross of Jesus finds meaning and the resurrection its power.

⁵³ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 76.

⁵⁴ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 77.

Such a view is problematic in the light of the very famous verse that reads “. . . for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”⁵⁵ While focusing on the transgression that injures African Americans, Cone appears to bestow on the victims of oppression a rightness that places them above the guilty perpetrators of racism. Such a view is like switching deck chairs on a sinking Titanic! A moral superiority may be assumed, but it only makes for a battle for dignity among doomed persons.

The work of the cross is flattened to fixing a social ill. When the cross and work of Christ redeems from sin, the social ones are included.

Reconciliation and Ecclesiology

Cone believed that the church is important. It is important because it is an entity that does not accept the evil of the world, pushes against unjust social laws, proclaims good news of freedom, and as a fellowship “is a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality.”⁵⁶

That visible manifestation meant that the church would be involved in liberation in the world. This would be that the church would not be separate from the world because the world was the place where the suffering was taking place and the liberation would take effect. Embracing the world, that is to take up the cause of nationalism, capitalism and the like, would be in conflict with the gospel. The world would be the place to fight evil. Failure to do so was to play into the hands of disenchanted social activists who regarded the church as a second-tier oppressor of black people. Cone pointed to the

⁵⁵ Rom. 3:23.

⁵⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Location 2653.

history of the black church's involvement in social justice as a lost *raison d'être* and saw its recovery being tied to becoming relevant again.

Roberts called the church "a kind of extended family," especially for those who did not have one of their own.⁵⁷ He approvingly quoted W.E.B. DuBois who said: "The Negro church of today is the social center of Negro life in the United States and the most characteristic expression of African character."⁵⁸ Roberts believed that the church is the beloved community, the family of God, the critical institution for African Americans, echoing Paul's words in Ephesians 3:14 -15 in support: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

Roberts held that the black church is to become a franchisee in the business of reconciliation since "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."⁵⁹ Christians cannot help but be agents of reconciliation. What but the grace and power of God can enable a human to rise to such heights? Reconciliation has to be based upon a sound Christian understanding of God. Reconciliation has to be based upon a proper appreciation of those created in the image of God. While others speak of the natural dignity of humans, the black theologian must press on to speak of the higher, God-given dignity of humanity. Understanding a divine basis for parity among human beings would be a necessary step if there is to be progress toward a moralized understanding of reconciliation that would involve the church.

⁵⁷ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 30.

⁵⁸ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 30.

⁵⁹ 2 Cor. 5:19.

Reconciliation and Eschatology

Both Cone and Roberts acknowledged that eschatology is essential. Cone held that the idea of heaven was far less important than knowing that God is working in the here and now.

Christian eschatology is bound up with the resurrection of Christ. He is the eschatological hope. He is the future of God who stands in judgment upon the world and forces us to give an account of the present. In view of his victory over evil and death, why must human beings suffer and die? Why do we behave as if the present were a fixed reality not susceptible of radical change? As long as we look at the resurrection of Christ and the expected ‘end,’ we cannot reconcile ourselves to the things of the present that contradict his presence. It is this eschatological emphasis that black theology affirms.⁶⁰

Cone saw eschatology as an ethical utility, a prompt for immediate action. Note the following:

With a black perspective, eschatology comes to mean joining the world and making it what it ought to be. It means that the Christian man looks to the future not for a reward or possible punishment of evildoers, but as a means of making him dissatisfied with the present. His only purpose for looking to a distant past or an unrealized future is that both disclose the ungodliness of the present. Looking to the future he sees that present injustice cannot be tolerated. Black Theology asserts an eschatology that confronts a world of racism with Black Power.⁶¹

Roberts critiqued Cone for not connecting the realized and the unrealized aspects of eschatology.

Ethics and eschatology are related in black theology. This is the basis of the black hope. This is the bridge between the now and the not yet, the promised and the fulfilled . . . Black hope present and future is bound up with an understanding of the Kingdom of God as present and future.⁶²

⁶⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2822.

⁶¹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, Orbis Books, Kindle Edition.

⁶² Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 90.

Conclusion

The aim of this exercise was to evaluate the theological soundness of a Bermudian AME Church's race-reconciling potential. The first step was to show the need to do theology based on the experience of the African people in Bermuda. This was attempted with the help of two African American theologians: J. Deotis Roberts and James Cone. Their contributions illustrated the necessary and powerful influence that a people's experience brings to bear on thinking theologically.

Cone sought to apply Black Power objectives in order to fashion a meaningful theological response to the crisis in the African American community. Roberts was sympathetic to the aims insofar as that theology retained its loyalty to the African American church and its higher ethical tenets, and not Black Power. Historic Christian beliefs undergirded the African American church's core values. Oden showed the African contribution to the global church, which undergirded the church's higher tenets. Cone did not reach far back enough into Christianity's tradition to find the solution to his dilemma located in the intellectual wealth of the African motherland. Roberts affirmed the black church's connection with Christian tradition. Carter's work is an example of the tradition serving as a powerful tool to be rid of harmful accretions. But Sung's comments leads this discussion to deal with another harmful layer: African American hegemony with respect to African Bermudian Christianity.

In speaking of the black church, a small excursus on context should be noted. Roberts spoke of Pitcher's concept of "equality of outcome" as an appropriate ideal to use in the African American situation. However, equality of opportunity best explains the Bermudian context and the political ascendency of the African majority. When

emancipation came in 1834, penniless slaves were turned out of their homes on the former slaveowners' estates, despite slaveowners being compensated by the British Government for lost labor. Free blacks rallied to aid their kinfolk and eventually their desperation was alleviated. During the subsequent years of segregation and white minority rule, African Bermudians bought property, started businesses and formed associations like the AME Church that helped them build a political base. After Bermuda opened to foreign military and commercial interests, new ideas like Black Power galvanized Bermudians to political activism. White political power gradually receded and in 1998 the government of Bermuda was taken over by the African-Bermudian political party.

This is a story of a Black majority pressing its advantage. This is instructive in how the oppressed are overcoming adversity and gaining power. It is a story very unlike that of African Americans who remain a very visible, and important, minority in the United States.

The Black Power movement influenced Bermuda, too. There is a need to delve further into the commonalities and differences that exist between the black experience in Bermuda and North American that would push beyond the limits of this paper. One critique which held that black power did not apply to Bermuda because of the presence of an African majority culture was robustly rebutted by a Black Power supporter, but he did not offer more than just a glib response that discounted important sociological differences. It must be acknowledged that Black Power did ignite a new sense of self in

Bermudians. It was also enjoyed cautious support from the church, which would make for a good topic for further exploration, given the present discussion.⁶³

I think that Roberts nicely balances the positive effects of black power on the African American community with the mission of the African American church, which is to be an agent of reconciliation. The Christian mission of reconciliation is to be reclaimed by the AME Church. Oden adds an important dimension to the discussion by taking the topic out of the North American theological realm, with all its influences, and spotlights the global values that undergird that mission. These values came about with the formative influence of continental African scholarship. I believe Oden does two very important things. He acknowledges the historic African contribution to the Christian Church. And, in doing so, he also opens the door for more African contributions to the conversation. I take this opening as an invitation for another African-diaspora community to join the chat. Therefore, a ministry of racial reconciliation in a Bermudian African Methodist Episcopal Church is offered for consideration.

⁶³ Quinto Swan, *Black Power in Bermuda* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 46-49.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATION

My Doctor of Ministry topic is racial reconciliation and how an offshore congregation can be a catalyst for cooperation between Christians of different racial groups. I was unprepared for what I personally experienced in the course of writing these papers. The Historical Foundations paper was eye-popping with respect to what was not well-known about the origins of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Bermuda. While the Theological Foundations was being written, I experienced a torrent of hurt, resentment and anger while reading the memoirs of James H. Cone, the North American patron saint of Black Theology. As Cone talked about his background and the deep questions that affected him, I could directly relate to his experiences. The books he read, I read. The pangs of injustice that sunk its teeth into him left the same bite marks on me. The sources of our discomfort differed: while Cone's problems sprang from white prejudice and racism in North America, mine stemmed from white and African American prejudice added to the British elitism as manifested in Bermuda's social relationships. And worse, there was what I discovered in the process of writing the history paper: ecclesiastical colonialism.

I refer the reader to the aforementioned papers for greater detail about these matters, but here I remember the anger that I felt over the North American attitude that holds local AME governance as inferior to that of the United States (but how they love

our money); that I lost the Social Action Committee chair to a foreigner in 2014 because I stated a Bermudian church position on gay marriage that caused the U.S. church some discomfort. An economic plan that would have lifted the Bermuda church to a position of financial independence was struck down by a U.S. bishop at the instigation of a Bermudian Presiding Elder, a man who was more prone to wreck innovation than to facilitate progress. It appeared to me that the North American AME Church wants to keep the Bermuda Annual Conference metaphorically barefoot and pregnant, operating primarily for how the U.S. church can benefit from Bermuda.

So fierce was my emotional boil-over that it disturbed my work. My writing was paralyzed. I had to seek an extension to the semester's deadline because my work was so far behind. I was in such an emotional funk that it made me hard to live with.

And then I reminded myself about the thrust of my project: reconciliation. I admit that the full thrust is racial reconciliation. However, any and every matter that touched on reconciliation suddenly clamored for my attention; that included my own imperfections. Now, I will attempt to do the best that I can to complete the project. I realize that I was coming at it with my own unresolved and unreconciled issues. Someone could have reasonably censured me for being hypocritical. I acknowledge that critique as having some merit. Nevertheless, I forge onward, being acutely aware of my own needs and flaws.

I proposed to explore my topic through the discipline of psychology. The sub-field of forgiveness will be my probe. I take what Legaree et al identified as the dominant position on forgiveness in an early review of the literature:

[F]orgiveness is an essential healing process that is to be actively pursued in therapy such that the client makes a conscious decision to work towards letting go

of resentment, and hopefully attains feelings of compassion for the person who betrayed him or her.¹

Sells and Hardgrave usefully identified six shared traits that the theories they examined had in common.

First, there is an injury or violation with subsequent emotional/physical pain. Second, the violation results in a broken/fragmented relationship between parties. Third, perpetuation of injury is halted. Fourth, a cognitive process is pursued where the painful events of action are understood and reframed within a full of context. Fifth, there is a release or letting go of justifiable emotion and retaliation related to the event. Sixth, there is a renegotiation of the relationship.²

It is my aim to use these traits as guideposts in the forgiveness process. Together with the above definition of forgiveness, I will first explore the link between forgiveness and reconciliation. Then the biblical, historical and theological foundation papers that have been written in support of my reconciliation project will be thematically examined to consider how each angle interacts with forgiveness.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Legaree et al identified some assumptions behind the subfield's dominant position. It is assumed that forgiveness is beneficial for the client. Authors associated with this view encouraged the clients to forgive, use directed and structured therapy, adopt a psychoeducational component, and work with both individuals and relationships. Many of the persons who adopt this position come from a Christian perspective where forgiveness is essential for salvation. Others who may not be so overtly religious also see

¹ Terri-Ann Legaree, Jean Turner and Susan Lollis, "Forgiveness and Therapy: A Critical Review of Conceptualizations, Practices, And Values Found in The Literature," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 33, no. 2 (2007): 209.

² James Sells and Terry Hargrave, "Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature," *Journal of Family Therapy* 20 (1998): 28.

the importance of forgiveness to the individual client or to a class. More critical authors view forgiveness as something clients do only for themselves. These authors also believe that anger is a healing force and that forgiveness ends up blaming the victim. These stances reflect more of a social justice, feminist perspective among the practitioners who work with survivors of trauma rising from abuse.³

Another assumption is that forgiveness is a decision one makes as opposed to a process that a person goes through. There is debate over whether forgiveness is a single, intentional, voluntary decision-event, or a process of discovery that cannot be willed into existence. The dominant position is the decision-event, but this paper is inclined toward Worthington's position. He advocates a practice that stresses emotion over cognition and leaves the client to make that decision to forgive toward the end of the treatment.⁴

One final assumption is whether forgiveness includes compassion and who forgiveness is for. It does include compassion, says the dominant position, and forgiveness is for the benefit of victim and abuser. Authors critical of this position encourage the clients to forgive themselves for the sake of their own healing but offer no ground for anything that would be to the benefit of the victimizer.⁵

Shifting to the main topic, observe one view of the relationship of forgiveness to reconciliation.

We note that other authors also conceptualize forgiveness as including, or as ideally heading toward, reconciliation (e.g. McCullough, Sandage, &

³ Legaree et al., "Forgiveness and Therapy," 196.

⁴ Legaree et al., "Forgiveness and Therapy," 204.

⁵ Legaree et al., "Forgiveness and Therapy," 207.

Worthington, 1997), suggesting that they also endorse benevolent aspects of forgiveness.⁶

The connection between forgiveness and reconciliation is also interesting because of the way the research blossomed. In 2010, Frise and McMinn remarked:

In the history of psychology, the topic of forgiveness is a relative newcomer, with the body of research growing rapidly over the past two decades.⁷

Legaree et al attributed this phenomenon to a conservative shift in North America, an emphasis on spiritual issues on counseling, the impact of violence and abuse and the availability of research funding.⁸ Another catalyst is illustrated in Kelman's comments about the history of reconciliation research:

The dramatic political change in South Africa in 1994, soon followed by the establishment of the truth and reconciliation commission, as well as a number of related efforts in other come up post conflict zones, they probably serve as a marker for the shift in attention in the concept of reconciliation among social scientists.⁹

It is the role that forgiveness plays in the reconciliation process that is of special interest here. I wondered why Legaree et al did not put the TRC on their list. Of forgiveness' influence on the research, Kelman further commented:

The apology-forgiveness cycle, which is central to Nadler and Schnabel's analysis of the reconciliation process, is directly germane to elements of identity change. As my formulation of reconciliation as identity change evolves, it will benefit from bringing change in the negative elements of each group's identity into the analysis of the process.¹⁰

⁶ Legaree et al, "Forgiveness and Therapy," 206.

⁷ Nathan Frise and Mark McMinn, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The Different Perspectives of Psychologists And Christian Theologians," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 2 (2010): 83.

⁸ Legaree et al, "Forgiveness and Therapy," 192.

⁹ Herbert Kelman, "Reconciliation from a Social-Psychological Perspective," In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*, Edited by A. Nadler, T.E. Malloy and J. D. Fisher (Oxford, UK: and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

¹⁰ Kelman, "Reconciliation from a Social-Psychological Perspective," 25.

Another impact example of forgiveness and reconciliation is the situation in Sierra Leone.

The [Truth and Reconciliation Committee] in Sierra Leone promoted the idea that healing activities should be based on the culture and traditions of the people when possible. Hence, the TRC sought assistance from traditional and religious leaders to facilitate public discussions and help with resolving conflicts arising from past violence to promote healing and, if possible, reconciliation. Based on the South African TRC model, forgiveness was an important intervention in Sierra Leone. The President of the country provided strong leadership to promote forgiveness at every level throughout the country by pleading with the population to forgive one another. The religious leaders and traditional leaders were also instrumental in participating in many ceremonies of forgiveness and reconciliation. The intervention of forgiveness combined with the healing strategies of telling the trauma story have been used as a therapeutic approach in a number of countries with some success (Dubrow & Peddle, 1997; Schumm, 1995; Staub & Perlman, 2000). Forgiveness has also been used in ceremonies to promote healing (Johnson et al., 1995, Truth & Reconciliation Commission, Sierra Leone, 2004) and with refugees (Peddle, 2007).¹¹

In remarking on his activities in connection to the Sierra Leone project, Loren Toussaint chronicled:

In the summer of 2007, two Luther [College] students and I embarked on a trip to Sierra Leone in order to apply forgiveness research to those struggling in the aftermath of a civil war. There was a lot of pain and suffering in the Sierra Leone region as a result of their decade long civil war, and I felt offering some training and some curriculum materials would hopefully provide a sustainable mechanism through the school. This aimed to help the younger generations to see the atrocities of the past through something of a more forgiving light.¹²

It was the TRC that triggered heightened interest in forgiveness and reconciliation research. It also inspired more than forty countries to use similar methods to address

¹¹ Fred Luskin, “LearningToForgive.com. 2018 Sierra Leone Forgiveness Project,” <https://learningtoforgive.com/research/sierra-leone-forgiveness-project>.

¹² Fred Luskin, “LearningToForgive.com. 2018 Sierra Leone Forgiveness Project,” <https://learningtoforgive.com/research/sierra-leone-forgiveness-project>.

conflicts.¹³ Australia is engaging its aboriginal people in forgiveness-based reconciliation.¹⁴

Forgiveness and the Historical Foundations for Racial Reconciliation

The Historical Foundations paper chronicled Bermuda's history, the arrival of African Methodism on the island, the genesis of RAAME and founder-Bishop Richard Allen's wish for a racially inclusive Kingdom agenda for Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia. One of the reasons of this history was to illustrate the differences in the Bermudian context's story compared to that of the United States. Another motive was to find a country with key similarities to Bermuda that I could look for help as I formulated a contextually relevant theology. I will name some pertinent cultural factors that I had in mind. The first is the presence of a majority African population in Bermuda. Secondly, that political control of the island now resides in the hands of that African majority. Add to that the second-highest density of churches per capita in the world, topped off with the introduction of the AME Church into territory that was already Christianized.

The Republic of South Africa fits the bill, and that is where my project looks to examine forgiveness' role in racial reconciliation. Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, the chairman of the TRC, reflected on its work and impact on the nation. He said:

So too I would say we South Africans will survive and prevail only together, black and white bound together by circumstance and history as we strive to claw our way out of the abyss of apartheid racism, up and out, black and white together. Neither group on its own could make it. God had bound us together. In a

¹³ Bonny Ibhawoh, "Do Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Heal Divided Nations?" January 23, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/do-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-heal-divided-nations-109925>.

¹⁴ Patricia Dudgeon and Harry Pickett, "Psychology and Reconciliation: Australian Perspectives," *Australian Psychologist* 35, no. 32 (2000): Abstract.

way we are living out what Martin Luther King Jr said – ‘Unless we learn to live together as brothers, we will die together as fools.’¹⁵

His opinion offers real hope for race relations in the island of Bermuda because here is an instance of reconciliation being subjected to a real-life political test: tackling South Africa’s transition from the regime of apartheid to black majority rule. The enterprise proved to be a beneficial one. Tutu spoke of his surprise invitation to head the TRC that included clergy, politicians, lawyers and health professionals among its members.

The President [Nelson Mandela] must have believed that our work would be profoundly spiritual. After all forgiveness, reconciliation and reparation were not the normal currency in political discourse. There it was more normal to demand satisfaction, to pay back in the same coin, to give as good as you got, to believe it’s a dog-eat-dog world. Most politicians were not there to heal, to redress imbalances and to reduce differences. They were elected because they were different and they existed to accentuate differences. Forgiveness, confession and reconciliation were far more at home in the religious sphere.¹⁶

Tutu’s comments offer credibility to the idea that a religious group has something of great value to offer to its society as it grapples with its problems. Spiritual values are not just for church folks. And secular solutions should not be automatically assumed to be superior simply because the spirit of the age is becoming increasingly irreligious, or that spiritual principles have somehow become irrelevant. There is not a more appropriate time for the power of these principles to be brought to bear on society’s stress points. An opportunity is presented for religious people to be engaged in the community’s conversations and activities without their convictions being disqualified or sidelined by secular prejudice.

¹⁵ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness: A Personal Overview of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Edury Digital: 2012, Kindle Edition, 6.

¹⁶ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 71.

The ground-breaking work of the TRC was tough. Tutu recalled the early difficulties of the TRC. Committee members from the various groups of South African society had to overcome their distrust of each other. Selection of staff was heavily criticized when the first few hires were all white people. The committee also had to wrestle with the justice of granting amnesty to perpetrators of atrocities more quickly than granting symbolic reparations to victims. But the outcome more than justified the labor. For example, there was a sharp drop in retaliatory crime compared to the apartheid era.¹⁷ Worthington and Cowden introduced their research with the following overview of the TRC's influence:

Transgression from the apartheid years still characterize many political and personal relationships, despite the replacement of apartheid by a culture of public reconciliation as espoused by the truth and reconciliation commission. Some reconciliation occurred, accompanied by justice, forgiveness and restoration. While not to everyone was satisfied with the process or the outcomes, the TRC has offered hope to many countries beset by conflict, prejudice, the history of violence and oppression, and injustices. As a result, substantial research was done on the TRC. This forms part of the present review, with summarises [sic] the research on forgiveness in South Africa and suggests an agenda for further forgiveness studies.¹⁸

Forgiveness and the Biblical Foundations for Racial Reconciliation

From history, our discussion moves to the pages of scripture. The selected Old Testament text for this project, Isaiah 2:1-5, contains three pertinent themes: restoration, reconciliation, and peace. The text describes the ingathering of all people groups to Mount Zion in Palestine. It predicts that Gentile populations will come to Jerusalem in

¹⁷ Gabriel Twose, “Healing or Opening the Wounds of The Past? Perceptions on the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” (PhD Dissertation, Clark Atlanta University, 2012), 8.

¹⁸ Everett Worthington, Jr. and Richard Cowden, “The Psychology of Forgiveness and Its Importance in South Africa,” *South African Journal of Psychology* 47, no. 3 (2017): 292.

such numbers that the verb describing their movements is the metaphor of a great river flowing. *nāhar* is a derived verb from the word *nāhār* meaning river (cf. Jer. 51.44 NASB). It is used to describe that future confluence of nations.¹⁹ From this new international headquarters universal peace is administrated and enforced – a peace that described metaphorically as the transformation of implements of war into farm equipment and there being no longer a desire for war. What makes this glorious vision possible is the governance of the Lord, whose presence at Mount Zion attracts people from all over the globe. They assemble to give attention to God's pronouncements of perfect justice. While forgiveness is not explicitly mentioned in the text, one can assume that atonement for sin and the judgment of sinners has been satisfied, which would have involved forgiveness at some point. The text also hints that the need for human adjudication in related matters and safeguards against non-compliance no longer exists.

The New Testament scripture, Ephesians 2:11-22, is paired with that vision of the future by identifying the agent who makes that vision possibility. Here forgiveness comes closer to the surface of the text. The immediate context records the Apostle Paul's exposition of the atonement achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ and its implications for the unity of the church. The Christ is the cosmic head of the universe and as the cosmic head he unifies humanity in one container: his own body. Having been joined together within his body, he then presents a unified humanity to God as the atoning agent. Christ is the reconciler of hostile parties, the embodiment of peace and the location of restoration. Earlier in Ephesians Paul says in him we have “the forgiveness of sins.”²⁰ The crucial

¹⁹ Botterweck et al., *Theological Dictionary of The Old Testament*, 560.

²⁰ Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb.; Acts 2:38; Acts 2:28.

image, Christ breaking down the dividing wall that separates humanity from each other illustrates the removal of the core element of hostility between contentious people groups, represented in the text as Jews and Gentiles.²¹

Here lies the critical connection between forgiveness and reconciliation. Because we have been reconciled with God by one agent, we are now reconciled with each other through that same agent. Successful reconciliation with God now impacts the relationship between God's people. Having received forgiveness, the believer now extends forgiveness as the way to participate in this marvelous settlement. Forgiveness is also explicitly endorsed as a mandatory practice. "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."²²

Gibson reported a thought-provoking finding as he investigated causal assumptions in the TRC's process.

Truth, in many instances, does contribute to reconciliation in South Africa. The process is not always simple and direct- and black South Africans who are religious are an important exception - but in general those who participate in South Africa's collective memory by accepting the 'truth' about the country's apartheid past are more likely to hold reconciled racial attitudes.²³

²¹ Eph. 2:14.

²² Col. 3:13.

²³ James Gibson, "Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation? Testing the Causal Assumptions of The South African Truth and Reconciliation Process," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (2004): 202.

Truth was defined as a collective memory which, once established, “it becomes difficult (although not impossible) for people to deny that certain activities did not take place.”²⁴

He explained the religious exception this way:

It may well be that among religious blacks, reconciliation is largely a non-political, other worldly process and thus is immune to influence by understandings of the facts about the country's apartheid past. Put another way, the *basis* [sic] for being reconciled differs between religious and irreligious blacks. Among the former perhaps reconciliation depends on the acceptance of certain religious teachings. Among the irreligious, reconciliation may turn on understandings of life on earth, not in the hereafter. thus, at least with this portion of the black population, truth is indeed connected to reconciliation.²⁵

Since forgiveness lies in the preparatory background of a future international unity, as previewed in Isaiah, and is a factor in the atonement that Christ achieved, as described in Ephesians, and is a foundational principle for the believer, then a forgiveness ethos must be a strong feature in the AME church's social action philosophy and praxis. This ethos drove Richard Allen's vision for Bethel. His experiences could have easily left him bitter and angry toward the white people who treated him so unjustly. Allen could have developed a prejudice against the entire white race because of what happened to him. But he did not. I credit his outlook to his commitment to the demands of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the attendant duty to be forgiving. The denomination that claims him as founder must figure out how to mimic Allen in order to live up to its claim to be both a liberating and a reconciling people.

²⁴ Gibson, “Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation?” 204.

²⁵ Gibson, “Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation?” 208.

Forgiveness and the Theological Foundations for Racial Reconciliation

Anyone who takes the Christian message of forgiveness seriously, must be open to the possibility that reconciliation between blacks and whites is a possibility.²⁶

This challenging statement began J. Deotis Roberts' sub-section titled "The Experience of Forgiveness." If forgiveness is raised up for theological attention, racial reconciliation has to be considered. The Theological Foundations paper described a conversation between Roberts and James Cone about how to theologize black power. Confronting injustice and the suppression of human dignity in a racist North American society can rightly be supported. However, if one claims a Christian perspective, the quest for justice and dignity must always be governed by a higher ethos: i.e. to love God and to love one another. Forgiveness is one manifestation of a love for one's neighbor.

Roberts agreeably quoted Waldo Beach when he says that the problem of race at its deepest level is a theological problem.

Its locus is not finally in man's cultural environment, nor in his inadequate knowledge of racial information, nor yet in his moral inertia. These are satellite powers to that final demonic iniquity, man's inner perversity of will, his worship of the finite.²⁷

A theological problem requires a theological solution. The AME Church's social justice theology must include an element to address this problem, since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."²⁸ Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and freeing the captive has to be combined with restoring the person to God and his or her

²⁶ J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2005), 59.

²⁷ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 14.

²⁸ Rom. 3:23.

community. Forgiveness is a purpose-built tool to use in the cause of restoration and reconciliation.

Theological contextualization was also important. The very nature of the term “Black Theology” brands it as a theological view from a particular constituency. I am aware that some consider all theology to be contextual. This question is of considerable personal interest because most of the theological literature that I have encountered has not been written by people who lived where I live, attended the same local school system as I did, nor share the same history and cultural distinctions. Is it only a legitimate theology when it comes from outside of Bermuda? I raise this issue here because of Gibson’s explanation of the contact hypothesis.

Adherents of the contact hypothesis view racial segregation as a source of ignorance and ignorance is a breeding ground for derogatory stereotypes and racial hostility. If stronger social bonds could be forged between blacks and whites . . . racial attitudes would improve dramatically.²⁹

RAAME’s members live in a multi-racial community. My synergy paper describes the close contact and frequent interactions that come with living in and around the town of St. George. I would not consider it nirvana, but it is a place that has very strong interracial social bonds. The contact hypothesis offers some tantalizing possibilities toward building racial reconciliation. But the question is whether the AME Church’s theological worldview can be inclusive enough to foster the kind of environment necessary for reconciliation.

For me it comes down to some considerations about context and its implications for theology. I could again raise up Bishop Allen as a model or toot the “liberation and

²⁹ Gibson, “Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation?” 203.

reconciliation” mantra. But I have to get beyond that. I must ask, if my context’s distinctive character makes it possible to build the kind of reconciliation that is hinted at in the contact hypothesis, using forgiveness as the way forward? Is it realistic, or just hard?

Another concern is stirred up by my self-interrogation. With the rising research interest in forgiveness, what about any apprehension that social scientists are co-opting a term that many practitioners and clients view as a religious concept which should not be cheapened by being used for purposes other than spiritual ones, i.e. therapeutic functions? Frise and McMinn examined this question by comparing a psychological view where forgiveness and reconciliation are two separate concepts, with a more religious perspective where the two terms are interrelated. Their objective was to look at whether forgiveness and reconciliation are viewed as related or distinct entities among scholars in psychology and Christian theology.³⁰ They found widespread agreement among all parties that forgiveness involved the release of negative feelings and the desire for revenge. The consensus broke down when it came to whether forgiveness meant the development of positive feelings and goodwill toward the offender. On this point theologians and the more religious psychologists concurred. The less-religious psychologists disagreed. When it came to whether forgiveness was related to restoring a relationship with an offender, the division grew even wider. Theologians were in greater agreement as a group in affirmation. The more-religious, non-expert psychologists joined

³⁰ Frise and McMinn, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” 85.

their expert colleagues in opposition. These findings, Frise concluded, were consistent with the literature of both disciplines.³¹

Frise recommended that forgiveness be viewed along a continuum between subjective (psychological) forgiveness and relational (theological) forgiveness, and that subjective forgiveness may be a precursor to relational forgiveness, or may be an end in and of itself in cases where a restored relationship is not possible (for instance, due to death), or deemed unwise and dangerous (such as in the case of an unrepentant abuser).³²

Frise and McMinn's work will prove to be useful when it comes time to implementing the project and creating the surveys to be used to measure the effects on the subjects. I can better anticipate the feelings of the subjects as they deal with racial reconciliation and how to respond to them thanks to these insights. Since I lean more toward the theologian-side of the ledger, I will have to be more careful to think about what the victim may go through with the prospect of meeting and interacting with an abuser before leaping to a conclusion that reconciliation absolutely must take place.

Conclusion

I began this discussion with how this process had personally affected me, and what I felt as I worked through thesis writing assignments. I confessed to having some emotional baggage that remains to be resolved. Then I spoke the decision to proceed with the topic of reconciliation. I chose to examine it from a psychological perspective or, more specifically, through the research on forgiveness. I found it exciting to connect with

³¹ Frise and McMinn, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," 88.

³² Frise and McMinn, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," 89.

my past as an undergraduate psychology major and bring that experience to bear at this level. I am very grateful for the invaluable assistance of Dr. Charles Martin-Stanley, my undergraduate advisor, in researching this paper.

When looking at how forgiveness was related to reconciliation, I got an exciting glimpse of what lay behind Bishop Desmond Tutu's comment about South Africa's TRC: "As I grow older I am pleasantly surprised at how relevant theology has become, as I see it, to the whole of life."³³ After a discussion about the assumptions behind the field's dominant definition of forgiveness, which I adopted, the literature described the impact of forgiveness on reconciliation. South Africa's TRC aided that country's transition from its apartheid past into black majority rule. The TRC inspired other countries to adopt similar conflict-resolution models. The social psychology field burst with new research. Such was the political and intellectual impact of a process where forgiveness was its modus operandi. Far from being decommissioned by secularism, theology remains relevant and vital to life. I am refreshed in my belief that social science can be "reconciled" with religion in a positive way.

As a bonus, I am convinced that the South Africa model would be very helpful for working toward racial reconciliation in Bermuda. Similarities in history, culture and politics, accompanied by a proven method, hold out a real potential for positive change in our society.

The Biblical Foundations paper showed how forgiveness is a silent partner in the Old Testament and New Testament texts chosen for this paper. The prophecy in Isaiah 2:1-5 serves notice that racial reconciliation will be humanity's certain and eternal future.

³³ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 73.

God's decrees will be the desire of nations who gather in reconciled peace with each other at Mount Zion. The apostle Paul informed believers that Christ has already achieved racial reconciliation by melding all people groups collectively within himself in the act of atonement. The guideposts shed a social science light on interpretation of the biblical texts by marking out the process from brokenness to the new, re-negotiated relationships signaled by those biblical texts; all of it enabled by forgiveness.

The Theological Foundations threw open a new window of theological reflection that is Bermuda-based, socially potent, and theologically sound. I was also tutored on what emotional signs to look for as I work with others, and on my own self. I learned not to be too quick to say to an injured soul: "You need to reconcile right now!" I must stop to ask about what caused their pain, whether it has stopped, and other vital questions before they ever get to a place of being conciliatory.

What is left to be done is to apply the learnings gleaned from the research literature and implement my project with confidence that the spiritual integrity of forgiveness can be preserved in an exercise that may have nonspiritual applications. Forgiveness is of high value to the Christian faith and socially relevant for our contentious society. By engaging the church in a racial reconciliation endeavor, we will be engaging one of the hot topics in our society, the legacy of slavery, with a view to making a positive and lasting difference.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Since the gospel of Jesus Christ transforms people and the societies in which they live, the African Methodist Episcopal Church’s ministry meme, “a liberating and reconciling people,” offers powerful possibilities to improving race relations in Bermuda.

Begun in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1794 by a former slave named Richard Allen, the AME Church expanded throughout the United States and now has members organized into twenty districts in thirty-nine countries on five continents. The Church was the leading advocate for social equality and social action in the United States. The AME Church history in Bermuda has a similar history. Local opinion regards the AME Church as the social gospel/ liberation denomination, a reflection of the character of its North American parent.

Reconciliation (specifically, racial reconciliation) is an infrequent, scattered AME endeavor in the United States. A different attitude exists offshore where Bermuda is home to a majority black population, living within a predominantly British social pattern with a white minority on a small, isolated archipelago in the North Atlantic Ocean. The character of Richard Allen AME Church (RAAME) in St. George’s, Bermuda reflects this difference through its ability to reach across racial lines in its ministries. A dance ministry begun at RAAME launched other dance ministries throughout Bermuda, uniting

and inspiring religious and secular artists of diverse backgrounds. For over thirty years RAAME partnered with other Christian fellowships in a Good Friday pageant known as “The Walk to Calvary.” A procession of locals and visitors to the island follow the cast through the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Towne of St. George as the scenes of the Lord Jesus Christ’s passion are played out at various sites. The cooperative spirit exhibited by St. George’s Christians attracts believers from all over the Bermuda (and sometimes from abroad) to enlist in the cast, become production crew members or join the audience.

The Walk to Calvary fosters cooperation in other ways. Pastors are collegial to one another. Members band together to serve free meals to the community. Singers and musicians work together in multi-denominational music ensembles. Members serve together in secular organizations. RAAME members’ loyalty to their church goes side-by-side with a deep commitment to a more universal Christian fellowship, making it easier to cross over denominational lines. Given the conditions mentioned above, I deemed a racial reconciliation project in RAAME to be achievable.

Forgiveness aided South Africa’ transition from apartheid into black majority rule. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) inspired other countries to copy its conflict-resolution model that incorporated forgiveness. The success of a political process where forgiveness played a key role is most encouraging to a church leader like me. Because of the similarities in history, culture and politics, supported by a proven public method, a forgiveness-based reconciliation project offers hope for positive change. What follows below is my attempt to do carry out such a project within RAAME.

Methodology

Hypothesis

I recall a thought-provoking comment in James Gibson's investigation of causal assumptions in South Africa's TRC process.

Truth, in many instances, does contribute to reconciliation in South Africa. The process is not always simple and direct – *and black South Africans who are religious are an important exception* (emphasis added) – but in general those who participate in South Africa's collective memory by accepting the 'truth' about the country's apartheid past are more likely to hold reconciled racial attitudes.¹

Truth was defined as a collective memory which, once established, "it becomes difficult (although not impossible) for people to deny that certain activities did not take place."²

Coming to a common understanding of the truth opened the door for reconciliation, but for many people it did not move directly to reconciliation. But reconciliation did move more directly and more quickly for one significant group of people – black, religious South Africans. Gibson explained the "religious exception" this way:

It may well be that among religious blacks, reconciliation is largely a non-political, other worldly process and thus is immune to influence by understandings of the facts about the country's apartheid past. Put another way, the *basis* [sic] for being reconciled differs between religious and irreligious blacks. Among the former perhaps reconciliation depends on the acceptance of certain religious teachings. Among the irreligious, reconciliation may turn on understandings of life on earth, not in the hereafter. Thus, at least with this portion of the black population, truth is indeed connected to reconciliation.³

¹ James Gibson, "Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation? Testing the Causal Assumptions of The South African Truth and Reconciliation Process," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (2004). 202.

² Gibson, "Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation?," 204.

³ Gibson, "Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation?," 208.

Notice how personal religious conviction transferred into social action – very significant social action when considering the issue that was on the table.

Since forgiveness lies in the background of a past remarkable political event, (the TRC) and a prophesied international political unity, as previewed in Isaiah, and as a factor in the atonement that Christ achieved, as per Ephesians, and is a foundational principle for the believer, then a strong forgiveness ethos has to feature in the AME church's social action theology and praxis. Bishop Allen could have developed a fierce prejudice against the entire white race because of his experiences. He did not. I credit his commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the attending duty to be forgiving. I am also hoping to add to the research on forgiveness by studying it in the Bermuda context. These are the underlying assumptions that I bring to my hypothesis. I hypothesize that black, religious RAAME members score higher on the measurement scale because of exposure to the intervention.

Research Design

A mixed methods approach was selected for this study. According to John W. Creswell, in his book *Research Design*:

Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone.⁴

⁴ John W Creswell, *Research Design*, SAGE Publications, 26. Kindle Edition.

I opted in favor of an integrated approach, choosing to merge the facility of numbers with the utility of words. Creswell noted the difference again:

Often the distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research is framed in terms of using words (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative), or better yet, using closed-ended questions and responses (quantitative hypotheses).⁵

Therefore, I adopted a phenomenological pre/post-test design. I want to explore RAAME members' experience with forgiveness. Two surveys will be employed. The first survey is an opinion survey (see Appendix A) that includes items that described some of the participants' ages and gender. Two items addressed the project. A project survey (see Appendix B) would measure participant responses before and after the intervention.

Measurement

The participants for both surveys were approximately the same: all were members of RAAME. The opinion survey (see Appendix A) asked about reopening the sanctuary for in-person worship. It also included two questions about the project. The first project question asked if they had heard about the project. The second item asked about whether they would participate in it. Both answers invited yes/no responses.

The second survey that was used for pre- and post-implementation measures was made up of twelve questions (see Appendix B).⁶ Respondents were invited to agree/disagree to the first two items that measured the forgiven-self index: "I often feel that no matter what I do now I will never make up for the mistakes I have made in the

⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 25.

⁶ I am indebted to Loren Toussaint and David Williams, "National Survey Results for Protestant, Catholic, and Nonreligious Experiences of Seeking Forgiveness and of Forgiveness of Self, of Others, and by God," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 27, no. 2 (2008): 120-130, for their description of the instrument and its items.

past" and "I find it hard to forgive myself for some of the things I have done wrong." The next five items comprised the forgiving-others index. Participants were asked when someone has hurt them: a) how often do you hold resentment or keep it inside, b) how often do you try to get even in some way, and c) how often do you try to forgive the other person. Participants were invited to respond with never, hardly ever, not too often, fairly often, very often and does not apply. To items d), I have grudges that I have held on to for months or years, and e), I have forgiven those who have hurt me. Participants responded with agree/disagree. The last index, seeking forgiveness, asked participants how often you would do the following: a) ask God's forgiveness when you have hurt someone, b) ask the other person's forgiveness when you have hurt someone, and c) pray for someone whom hurt you. Participants answered agree/disagree to these items.

Instrumentation

The professional associates with whom I had the privilege to work brought a variety of influences to this project. Two of them came from my time spent in school. Richard Lints, a former academic dean of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and my academic advisor while there, catalyzed my theological development. He stimulated my apologetics focus by teaching one of my most memorable classes, "Critiques of Christianity." Among the range of scholars reviewed was J. Deotis Roberts, who I had the privilege of hosting during his visit to the campus. Under Rick's supervision, I navigated the field of theology. He patiently fielded my many questions and kept me theologically focused on my context during this Doctor of Ministry process. Charles Martin-Stanley is the Associate Dean of the University of Wisconsin-Lacrosse and was

my honors advisor at Central State University. His guidance during the interdisciplinary phase included insights into relevant psychological sub-fields and potential sources.

Loren Toussaint of Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, assisted me in shaping, delivering, and analyzing the project. Nicholas Rowe, associate professor of history and peace studies at Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts, has a strong interest in cultural identity formation in the Atlantic world and in conflict resolution. His work on Bishop Richard Allen established a foundational pillar of my research: the interracial nature of early North American Methodism. Leonard Santucci is the pastor of Vernon Temple AME church, a life-long friend and a valuable resource in AME matters. He interacted with me on denominational history, polity, and structure.

I was personally challenged by the program requirement to include context associates in my doctoral work. Never have I disclosed so many personal details to members of congregations that I pastored. Hence, I am very grateful to RAAME's Steward Board for their input and support. Gilbert and Joyce Hayward were on RAAME's ministerial staff before being sent to lead their own congregation. Their enthusiasm and relationship with RAAME made them wonderful sounding boards for my queries about the congregation's relationship dynamics. Several members gave encouragement, advice and historical mementos. One of the most valuable contributions was from Mrs. Pamela Wilkinson, a RAAME member who is employed in the Bermuda Government Department of Statistics. I relied on her priceless assistance in gathering census data during the context analysis.

Several partners came alongside me as community context associates during the different phases of the program. Some wish to remain anonymous; therefore, I will

respect their wishes even as I express my appreciation. The Honorable Craig Cannonier, the Opposition Leader of Bermuda, offered a valuable perspective on the role of the church in society and politics during the early stages. Philip “Phoopa” Anderson operated the Visitors Information Center in the St. George Town Square. He was a huge advocate of the town and is responsible for getting me involved in leading the UNESCO walking tours. He and I provoked each other in learning more about the history of St. George, and his death deprived us of an amazing personality. David Frith, the Town Crier of St. George, and Suzann Roberts-Holshouser completed the team that kept history alive almost every day in the Town Square. Their contribution as living historians, along with Peter Frith of the St. George Foundation, enriched my research.

The input of other clergy members was important. Ray and Gloria White-Hammond, co-pastors of Bethel AME Church, Boston, Massachusetts, have a congregation that I would imagine as an ideal. This African American congregation attracts all kinds of people, has a solid Bible ministry, and a cutting-edge social justice ministry. The Hammonds have been a great support and models to my wife and me in personal and ministerial matters. I had Bethel (AMEC) Boston in mind throughout the Doctor of Ministry program. Joseph Whalen probed my thinking about the theology of the exercise and was a great sounding board for my hopes at RAAME.

Implementation

Collection of Data

Completing a newly implemented IRB process in February 2020 interrupted and delayed the original project calendar dates; therefore, arrangements had to be made to reschedule the project.

On March 22, 2020, in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic's spread to Bermuda, the Minister of Health, the Honourable Kim Wilson, J.P., M.P., signed a public health closure order for:

... schools, tourist accommodation swimming pools, gyms, beauty salons, spas and barbers; as well church services (except funerals), sports club activities and concerts with more than 50 people.⁷

These public health orders were supplemented by a midnight-to five a.m. curfew order issued by the Premier of Bermuda, the Honorable E. David Burt, J.P., M.P., on March 27, 2020 that would run until April 14, 2020.⁸ His Excellency the Governor, Mr. John Rankin CMG, upgraded that order by proclaiming a state of emergency in Bermuda on April 1, 2020, imposing a twenty-four hour shelter-in-place restriction. The proclamation was subsequently ratified by Bermuda's House of Assembly on April 6, 2020 and eventually evolved into the Emergency Powers (COVID-19 Shelter in Place) Regulations 2020. This Act of Parliament contained the following law for churches.

Religious establishments

⁷ Bermuda Government "COVID-19 Update." <https://www.gov.bm/articles/covid-19-update-22-march-2020>.

⁸ Paul Johnston, "Burt Imposes Overnight Curfew," Royal Gazette, May 28, 2020. www.royalgazette.com/health/article/20200327/burt-imposes-overnight-curfew.

(1) Churches and all other religious establishments shall remain closed during the curfew.

(2) Members of the clergy shall be permitted to enter a church or other religious establishment during the hours of 7am to 7 pm, provided appropriate social distancing is maintained.

- (a) for private prayer (maximum of five persons); and
- (b) in order to broadcast a service via electronic means (maximum of five persons in total to conduct the service and facilitate the broadcast).

(3) Graveside funerals are permitted with a maximum of ten mourners, plus the officiant and funeral home staff, provided appropriate social distancing is maintained at all times.⁹

This interruption of RAAME's regular activities pushed back the project implementation even further. As the COVID-19 situation became stable enough to begin a return to normalcy, the rules were relaxed through a series of phases, beginning with Phase I on May 2, 2020. It was not until the introduction of Phase III that churches could reopen for worship with appropriate measures and restrictions. Thankfully, after consultation with mentors and professional associates, an alternative implementation date was planned for the summer month (August), with a fall spot (November) tagged as an alternate date. The project would be delivered via the online platforms of Zoom and Facebook with the added assistance of WhatsApp and Survey Monkey.

From March to July 2020, RAAME members were updated on the status of the project through the regular announcements shared during the Sunday morning virtual worship service. An annual theme, “Father, Forgive Them,” was adopted in January 2020. Sermon series like as “The Vine” emphasized a Christian’s connection with Christ

⁹ Emergency Powers (COVID-19 Shelter in Place) Regulations 2020, [www.bermudalaws.bm/laws/Annual%20Laws/2020/Statutory%20Instruments/Emergency%20Powers%20\(COVID-19%20Shelter%20in%20Place\)%20Regulations%202020.pdf](http://www.bermudalaws.bm/laws/Annual%20Laws/2020/Statutory%20Instruments/Emergency%20Powers%20(COVID-19%20Shelter%20in%20Place)%20Regulations%202020.pdf). Retrieved August 1, 2020.

in anticipation of the forgiveness project. As RAAME prepared for restarting worship services in the sanctuary, a survey was floated in July 2020 among the members asking their opinions about the church's reopening plans. The survey also asked them whether they had heard of, or would be willing to participate in, the project. In response to the question, "Have you heard about the pastor's research project that is to run during the month of August?", twenty-nine persons answered the question, two participants skipped it. Fourteen persons said "yes," fifteen said "no." The question "Would you be willing to participate in the research surveys?" received a twenty-five-person response with six persons choosing not to answer the question. Of the twenty-five responses, fifteen persons said "yes," ten people said "no."

A pre-existing sermon series used as a template was "Forgiveness – The Real F-Word." This instrument was created by the Journey Church of New York City. The sermon titles were: "Finding Forgiveness" (Luke 15:11-32); "How Can I Forgive Myself?" (Matthew 26:75); "How Can I Forgive Others?" (Luke 11:4); "Is Forgiveness Really Forever?" (1 John 5:13); "Living Forgiven" (Colossians 1:14). These sermon texts and titles were adapted for use in the context..

The Bible study series, "Forgiveness: Making Peace with The Past", was selected as the Bible study series text. The study was divided into two parts. Part one: "How God Forgives Us" contained these titles: "Our Forgiving Father" (Luke 15:11-32); "Why We Need Forgiveness" (Ephesians 2:1-10); "Confessing Our Sin" (1 John 1:5-2:2); and "The Shout Of A Forgiven Man" (Psalm 32). Part two: "How We Forgive Others," included "Out Of Debt" (Matthew 18:21-35); "When We Are Wounded" (Matthew 18:15-20); "As

We Forgive Others" (Matthew 6:5-15); and "Forgiving When We Don't Feel Like It," based on the book of Philemon.

Having identified the titles, guest presenters were recruited to assist me with delivering the material. James Anyike of Scott Memorial United Methodist Church of Indianapolis, Indiana, and the Reverend Lee Fields of Beaumont, Texas, preached: "How to Forgive Myself" and "Is Forgiveness Really Forever?," respectively. Bishop Nicholas Dill of the Bermuda Anglican Church led the study "The Shout of a Forgiven Man," and Mr. Cordell Riley of CURB presented "Forgiving When We Don't Feel Like It."

A PowerPoint presentation summarizing my Doctor of Ministry project was shown to the members during a virtual Church Conference on July 20, 2020. The same presentation was also uploaded to my Google page and the link was shared via RAAME's WhatsApp chat and email list. Further use of online platforms was made with YouTube videos highlighting project events and Survey Monkey for deploying the surveys. An online newsletter was also set up to give access to project products and sessions at www.smore.com/bc612.

During the week leading up to the launch of the study, the steward board was briefed, and the informed consent form was distributed over WhatsApp chat. The media team also shared the form with members who had email addresses. Hard copies were put alongside the communion cup bags for collection. This collection routine became normal practice ever since in-person worship stopped in March.

On Sunday, August 2, 2020, I preached "Finding Forgiveness" from Luke 15:11-32. The sermon was pre-recorded and streamed via Zoom over Facebook at 11:00 a.m. The homiletical idea was "God's forgiveness is found in Christ" with three points: One

must recognize their need of God; one has to return to God through the Lord Jesus Christ; and one must receive God's forgiveness without duress or suspicion. The broadcast ran for seventy-four minutes and had one hundred and thirty-nine Facebook views that day.

On Wednesday, August 5, 2020, I led the Bible study "The Forgiving Father," using Luke 15:11-32. The study was held over Zoom where I served as the host. The study focused on the actions of the father in Luke 15:20 as he runs to embrace his prodigal son. Participants were invited to compare the behavior of that father with the lovingkindness shown by God, and how this character trait could transfer to dealing with the "undeserving" people in their own lives. There were ten participants and the study lasted ninety-one minutes.

The first twelve-question online survey was launched through SurveyMonkey. Called "Forgiveness & Reconciliation Survey 1", a deadline for responses was fixed for August 15, 2020 at midnight. Collector invites were distributed via the RAAME WhatsApp group and member email list.

Thursday, August 6, 2020 saw the launch of the first YouTube video highlighting the main points of the Bible study while encouraging the congregation to participate in the project (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1ELdkELKBs).

James Anyike preached on the subject "How to Forgive Yourself" (Luke 11:75) on Sunday, August 9, 2020. During the simulated live-streamed service, he made the point of acknowledging the blemishes on our lives that seem to be irremovable. But he asserted that if God had gone through such lengths to forgive us, then how could we not forgive ourselves. The service lasted seventy-five minutes with three conference call participants and one hundred and thirty-five Facebook views on the day.

The Wednesday night Bible study saw ten Zoom participants and two conference callers interacting with me on the PowerPoint-assisted topic, “Confessing Our Sin” (1 John 1:5-2:2). The word, “confess” (*homologeo*), means “to say the same thing.”¹⁰ The discussion ranged from what it meant to be “living in the light” (1 John 1:7 NLT) with the assurance rising from the fact that God’s promise of forgiveness rests on God’s faithful and consistent character. Participants were invited to respond to these two statements: “It does not matter how I live because God will forgive me” and “I have sinned too deeply for God to forgive me.” The study was seventy-five minutes in length.

The deadline for survey responses went into effect at midnight on Saturday, August 15. Twenty responses were received. Nineteen participants did the survey online. One participant gave responses over the phone. The links to the collectors were deactivated during the afternoon of August 16, 2020.

The Sunday morning worship service on August 16, 2020 was an in-person gathering in the backyard of the church at 9:00 a.m. Social distancing and other COVID-19 protocols were observed. Members and their families drove their cars, set up tents and collapsible chairs and worshiped together for the first time in months! A FM transmitter was used to broadcast the service to the neighborhood on FM96.1. The service was rebroadcast via Zoom on Facebook at 12 p.m. I preached on the subject “How to Forgive Others” from Luke 11:4. Forgiving someone requires that we remember how much God has forgiven us, then we make the decision to release the person from any emotional debt to us while surrendering the right to avenge ourselves, recognize God’s purpose in our experiences, re-establish the relationship if practicable, and repeat the process for any

¹⁰ Strong’s Greek Concordance 3670, “homologeo,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/3670.htm>.

further injury we may suffer. The homiletical idea was that the forgiven forgives. Thirty-five people were present, at least two households reported hearing the service on their radios, and the eighty-one-minute Facebook service received one hundred and seventy-six views plus four shares that day.

The Right Reverend Nicholas Dill, prelate of the Anglican Church in Bermuda, led the “Out of Debt” Bible Study on Wednesday, August 19, 2020. Bishop Dill relied on Jesus’ parable of the unjust servant in Matthew 18:21-35 to talk about the standard of forgiveness that operates in the kingdom of God. Being forgiven, our great debt by God, obliges us to forgive the comparatively tiny claim we might place on others. Ten persons participated via Zoom; two persons used the conference call line. The study lasted ninety-eight minutes.

The service format returned to a pre-recorded format on Sunday, August 23, 2020. Lee E. Fields, the pastor of East Mount Olive Baptist Church in Port Arthur, Texas, preached “Is Forgiveness Forever.” He spoke of the assurance of a believer that salvation was indeed eternal. He quoted John Stott that doubt in this aspect of doctrine maybe symptomatic of doubting the veracity of God's word. Therefore, believers' salvation was secure because of the character of its author. The service went sixty-eight minutes before being halted by a technical glitch. A reboot allowed the last seventeen minutes to be shown. The Facebook page on the Monday morning following showed three shares of the video along with one hundred and ninety-eight views.

The final Bible study took place on Wednesday, Aug 26, 2020, over Zoom and the conference call line. Cordell Riley, the featured presenter, is the vice president of Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda (CURB), a restorative justice organization. The

study, “Forgiving When You Don't Feel Like It,” was based on the book of Philemon. Participants were challenged to thinking about the cost of forgiving and the reasons that may prohibit releasing someone from emotional debt. The Apostle Paul wrote to a slave-owning believer, Philemon, on behalf of his runaway slave Onesimus, who had experienced salvation and a turnaround in his life. Paul asked for a new arrangement for Onesimus, personally pledging to restore whatever debt Onesimus owed Philemon. The session lasted ninety minutes. Two callers used the phone line and nineteen persons participated through Zoom.

Ernest Signor, Sr. preached the series finale, “Livin’ Forgiven,” from Colossians 1:13-14 on Sunday, August 30, 2020. He used the experience of traveling with a light backpack to underline the importance of adopting a forgiving approach to life. The service lasted seventy-one minutes, had one phone line participant and eighty-nine Facebook views.

The post-intervention survey was launched immediately following the service’s conclusion. Reminders were posted almost daily on WhatsApp and in the Sunday service announcements. An email that offered project instructions and computer links was sent out on Tuesday, September 1, 2020. The survey deadline was September 12, 2020, but the collectors were closed on September 16, 2020 due to Hurricane Paulette that struck Bermuda on Monday, September 14, 2020 and the loss of power supply to many homes. The pre- and post-data sets were sent for analysis on Wednesday, September 16, 2020 and the results came back on Thursday, September 17, 2020.

Analysis of Data

The opinion survey (see Appendix A) asked participants, "Have you heard about the pastor's research project that is to run through the month of August?" Twenty-nine respondents replied, two skipped the question. Fourteen answered yes, fifteen replied no. To the question, "Would you be willing to participate in the research surveys?", twenty-five participants answered, six skipped it. Fifteen said yes, ten said no. "What is your gender?" attracted twenty-nine responses; three skipped the question. There were twenty-six females, two males. In the age range item, two respondents were between the ages of thirty-five to forty-four; three respondents were forty-five to fifty-four; seven were between fifty-five and sixty-four, six respondents were sixty-five to seventy-four years of age; ten respondents were seventy-five years old and over.

The research survey Forgiveness and Reconciliation Survey One (see Appendix B) received twenty respondents; Survey 2 received nineteen. The data did not show any significant differences between the measurements. My hypothesis that RAAME members' attitudes about forgiveness would show an increase as a result of the intervention was not supported.

Outcome

I discovered that failing to make a statistical difference is not the same as making any difference at all. Reconciliation is a powerful topic. Here were some reactions from the congregation.

When briefed after the opinion survey, members shared how they hoped the project will make a change within the church. One person asked if the dissertation was

going to be made public; that would be a good thing for Bermuda, in their opinion. Were other pastors doing similar projects within their churches?

One commenter referred to the name “African” and how that name would put off white people and others by implying that the church was only for black people. A member said the church should be proud of the pastor for expanding his skills and that reconciliation was needed in the church and the society. Anything presented on topics like these would be a benefit to everyone’ spirituality. What the pastor was pursuing should be considered an asset.

Another member spoke of their excitement after learning about the topic and how black people can turn the corner on racism and embrace other people groups. Jesus’ ministry was about reconciliation and forgiveness – we should do it, too. But this topic is not talked about much in AME circles.

Someone else was happy to hear about forgiveness and reconciliation in a time when the race issue has come to the forefront again. Reconciliation could begin in the church. They recalled Bishop Richard Allen’s efforts and hope that we as a people would “get it”, that we can reap the spiritual benefits of being quick to forgive and reconcile, and about being ambassadors of forgiveness and reconciliation, which was Jesus’ mission.

One person said that the project was a huge undertaking for our community, our world and our church. Another person asked what the outcome expectations would be, whether all the work was done just for the sake of the project or was it to effect change in the officers and auxiliaries.

In between the opinion and research project briefings, the RAAME Media team's response to the project took center stage. These members performed marvelously through the COVID-19 lockdown period. The simulated-live worship experiences and the Bible studies were transformed by their creative efforts. Their story spoke of another transformation taking place during that period – the one that was going on within the team. Their stories were shared during a mid-week Bible study. Each team member was given three minutes to make their points, assisted by PowerPoint slides. The Bible study participants learned about some of the issues that team members had to work through, their views on what it means to be reconciled, and their suggestions for RAAME moving forward toward reconciliation ministry.

During the Church Conference after the project was over, I presented the research results with the members, as per the research design. I told them that my hypothesis was not supported by the data. I added how pleasantly surprised I was that, during the time between the opinion survey and the project survey, the number of people who said they would participate in the surveys doubled from ten to twenty. There were comparatively fewer responses to the research survey than to the opinion survey – in fact, only two. One participant spoke of being dissatisfied with an accommodation issue and strongly expressed that discontent to a staff member. Because of what had been discussed during the intervention, the participant felt convicted about the tone with which the complaint was delivered and sought out the staff member to apologize to her. Finally, the participant spoke of wanting to readily make amends with people and with God because of the intervention. Another person found the Bible verses featured in the intervention to be personally meaningful. This participant appreciated the discussions that were had during

the series. Finally, comments were made about forgiveness becoming easier by seeing people as they are and not by how we may perceive them.

Some of the feedback I received came through private conversation. One person spoke of receiving a social media friend request from someone who was the source of emotional pain years ago. “I thought I forgave him, but when I saw that [request], I had a bad day.” Another person spoke of supporting someone even though that individual had traumatized their family. Other members expressed their concern about the relationships between RAAME members and how those relationships could improve. Their comments indicated a hope that this intervention could be a turning point for the church.

I received feedback from participants at various points during the intervention. Some spoke of the impact of a presenter, or how the topic under discussion stirred their thinking. During one session a participant asked about avoiding contact with people who may have been forgiven, but there were still lingering issues with them. The presenter replied that while there may need to be some space between them and the offender, the most important part was the participant’s inner attitude toward the person – that they would have to be able to pray for the wellbeing of the person. If the inner attitude is not quite what it should be, then it becomes a matter of spiritual concern because receiving God’s forgiveness is contingent on us forgiving others.

Someone spoke of how relieved it felt to be forgiven by God. The pressure that comes with feeling trapped in a life without God, despite having a church background, is gone. In its place comes the desire to help someone else who may feel cut off. Another member made some remarks about how to handle a person who has betrayed a trust. Their solution was to seek help from the Holy Spirit to get to a place of restoring the

relationship and not allowing the situation to linger until it got worse. There was also a side-conversation about having the kind of relationships that allow for deeper discussions.

Online reactions came from members and others on Facebook. August 9, 2020: “Good morning raame (sic) thanks for the word on forgiveness”; “Thank you Rev. Anyike for that transforming Word.” August 16, 2020: “Amen! Powerful and meaningful Word for a time such as this.” August 30, 2020: “Carryin' on!! Livin' Forgiven!! Amen!!!”

Thus far, I have spoken about responses that related to RAAME. There were responses coming from outside RAAME. Reconciliation raised healthy dialogue at various times during my Doctor of Ministry intensives. I recalled one presentation by a conservative African American woman that agitated my focus group colleagues because of its slant away from the “orthodox” tenets of prophetic ministry. Not only could I imagine the same agitation going on in the other focus groups, but I got a good sense of the racial divide in United States religious circles.

One amazing story came from within my focus group. During a group session each person spoke in turn about their project. One of my peers heard my summary and was motivated to reconcile with brothers who had been estranged from each other for years. As was later told to us, these men were vehemently opposed to each other. So sharp were their differences that family members made it a matter of prayer that this situation would change. And a breakthrough happened! As it stands now, all but one brother has met together, while the outstanding brother is now on speaking terms. What a story of God’s grace in action!

My conversations with Bishop Nicholas Dill turned into an opportunity to work on the Race Commission of the Bermuda Anglican Communion as a consultant. The Anglicans are addressing the race issues within the most racially diverse religious denomination in Bermuda. This opportunity puts me on the front-line of the race issue in a body whose history is very intertwined with that of race, governance.

It has been a privilege to linking up with other religious scholars. The seminary atmosphere has so many wonderful scholars from so many backgrounds. I have learned much in an environment that has years of education and insight. To this invigorating milieu was added the people who I came into contact during my research. Christina Davidson's dissertation was very influential in my historical foundation. Nicholas Rowe alerted me to a lecture that Davidson gave at the Massachusetts Historical Society. I was able to have a conversation with her in which we discussed the topic that holds so much fascination for the both of us. Especially significant was her description of the BME relationship with the AME Church.

Another scholastic gift was Lisa Weaver's interest in Christian worship that led to working with patristic literature. J. Deotis Roberts and other African American scholars also focused on early Christian thought, for reasons discussed above. My dialogue with her reinforced my contention that the African American church's theology cannot rest on its experience alone. The African-influenced Christian tradition is equally as important as its experience.

As I sought to frame my endeavor in the larger scheme of things, I set out a five-stage strategy for RAAME. The first stage is research. My Doctor of Ministry project was a discovery exercise. I learned about RAAME's history. A base line was established

regarding the experiences of RAAME's members with forgiveness. They had the opportunity to say what forgiveness meant like to them and these experiences have been recorded. The next stage is an educational one; to take this data and use it to inform our search for ways to raise members' knowledge, and that the change is quantifiable. I will continue to learn about RAAME's history and form a narrative on which to base this congregation's identity as a Christian fellowship that is called for a specific purpose: to draw people closer to God and to each other.

The third stage would be to link reconciliation to a heightened knowledge of forgiveness. I envision working with members to apply reconciliation within RAAME. We will work to resolve long-standing conflicts, to better manage disputes and to mediate disagreements. The fourth strategic step would be to look beyond RAAME. We would seek to form intentional alliances with other Christian bodies that desire to work on healing divisions and resolving conflicts.

The final stage is to disperse RAAME's experience with forgiveness and reconciliation into political, economic, and academic spheres. One potential opportunity has to do with a recent announcement to build a mediation center in Bermuda to settle international disputes. I envision RAAME sending young people to schools with degree programs in peace studies and similar fields, who become involved in the center that is being constructed by the Bermuda government.

Conclusion

Summary of Learnings

I learned quite a bit about RAAME during this Doctor of Ministry process. As I researched my context, I quantified the age range of the congregation and saw how much RAAME mirrored the distribution of age in Bermuda's population. Our society is ageing, and the same concerns that come with an ageing society apply to this congregation. I prepared a survey of the congregation in preparation for the Ministry Focus paper and learned what they liked best about their church (love), what problems they were aware of (the majority say "nothing"), what would they change (the worship service was the number one area) and what problems they wanted to see RAAME address.

My appreciation for RAAME and the Towne of St. George grew tremendously as I learned the history of both entities. I am convinced that as our members and our fellow citizens discover more about the global influence that Bermuda has had in the past, they will develop a greater appreciation for their own worth and what they can contribute to the world's historical, social and religious culture.

This consideration led to a question that has plagued me for a long time: "What does it mean to be Bermudian?" How do we to distinguish our fundamental Bermudian identity from the influences coming into the island from the outside? Every Bermudian has immigrant roots, be it African, European, North American, Portuguese, or West Indian, to name a few. This question of identity filtered into to my quest for a Bermudian theological voice. I experienced great dissatisfaction. I found it tough to get people to articulate those characteristics that make us unique as Bermudians. What does it mean to

be a Bermudian at this point of history? What does it mean to be a member of this church? What purpose captures one's loyalty and causes a person to invest time, resources and skills in RAAME? For a long time, I have seen how Bermudians place less value in their own history, culture and identity in comparison with other cultures, usually first world cultures. We get our validation from how closely we copy others. Spending time in scholastic reflection has led me to some ideas which I have incorporated into this paper and I plan to use them in a platform for future work.

Doing research into RAAME allowed me to understand our situation more clearly, less colored by my own preconceptions and more deeply than what the people chose to tell me. Census figures about income levels, housing statistics, employment numbers, immigration status and the information contained in electoral registers let me discover more about the nature of the community and RAAME members' standing within it.

I learned more about the generosity of RAAME members during the process. RAAME allowed me the time to work on my Doctor of Ministry, in lieu of financial support which they would have given to me if the resources were available so. Some people commented on the value of learning about RAAME's history. Others shared personal stories, pictures and other valuable source material to help me understand my context. Some members tutored me in the nuances of St. George's life, politics and culture, for which I will always be grateful.

The sensitivity of the subject of race became more evident as the project progressed. I had been feeling out members' personal experience with racism for some time. I found that some of them harbored some of the same emotions that I did. Others

were hopeful for better racial relationships. I sense that some members will be more resistant to change than others.

The Black Lives Matter movement and the recent general election October 1, 2020, which saw the Progressive Labour Party gain an even more dominating position in Bermuda's House of Assembly, raise new questions on the issue of race. What is the way forward in race relationships? How will Bermuda's black majority handle the white minority now that the political tables are reversed from what it was only decades ago? What impact can Bermuda have on the United States by way of resolving their racial conflict? The time is ripe for a liberating and reconciling people to step forward with a viable solution.

I also learned so much about myself during my enrollment. The design of United Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry degree required reflection on my own life and respond to how God shaped me into the man that I am now. I was pushed to the edges of my comfort zone by this exercise. However, I was forced out of that zone completely by the program requirement of context associates. So, not only was I to delve deeply into my own self, I was also obligated to share those insights with other people. Again, it was a challenge.

A better understanding of the people requires me to be a better communicator, so that what they hear from me is what I intended to say – and vice versa. I attribute my deficiency in communication to my love for education. I rediscovered how much I loved and missed the academic environment. What a refreshing relief it was to have the deep theological discussions, to wrestle with ideas and to be challenged by the thoughts of so many influencers! My communication challenge is two-fold. First, that I translate what I

learned to the differing levels of understanding and expectation that exist in RAAME.

Second, that I increase my listening abilities to better comprehend what members are saying beneath their words.

Above I reported an emotional upheaval in my work while dealing with James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts for the Theological Foundations paper. At the time I thought that I had resolved some of the underlying issues and moved on. Evidently not. The deeply held bitterness over my disappointments with my church and the people connected to it was exposed. Since that time, I acquired more knowledge about forgiveness that I was able to apply to myself. My journey to forgiveness has been greatly helped by learning that the choice to forgive comes from my will and not my emotions. Choosing to forgive is a battle that can be won. The rewards — the peace, the freedom and joy — are worth the struggle.

One of the best pieces of advice that I received concerning the anger episode was to redirect the emotion into my Interdisciplinary Foundations paper. Here the topic of forgiveness surfaced. Loren Toussaint and Charles Martin-Stanley's guidance led me to the work of Bishop Desmond Tutu with the TRC. The research on forgiveness was fruitful in understanding myself, affirming in the power of theology to deliver social change, and raising a new appreciation of the TRC's regional and global impact.

Walking through the Ephesians text convinced me even more that the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is the solution for human conflict. The Scripture made me confront the issue of anti-Semitism first, since the division Paul directly addressed was that which existed between Jews and Gentiles. I reflected on that historical rift and how that struggle has played out through history. Then I sensed the same tensions that exist in

class struggle, economic inequality, geo-political struggles, clashes about gender, justice, equality of opportunity, and domestic violence. I questioned myself as to whether I was willing to take the risk of stepping into the middle of conflict with a call for calm and mutual understanding. Then I was reminded of the one who blessed peacemakers and offered himself as the go-between in the greatest conflict of all – the case of a holy God and a fallen humanity. Jesus succeeded. Isaiah saw the outcome of reconciliation in his vision. The Christian church has the advantage of offering to the world a guaranteed peaceful outcome.

The greatest challenge of this period was presented by COVID-19. Not only did RAAME have to switch its activities to online platforms, I had to adapt the delivery of the Doctor of Ministry project. I discovered that change can happen, and that one of the most effective incentives to change is to be given no choice but to change.

I look back over the Doctor of Ministry process and ask if I could have done anything differently. From a research perspective I could have included more Caribbean writers. I was introduced to the work of Sir Hilary Beckles, the vice chancellor of the University of the West Indies and a leading voice about reparations for slavery from Great Britain. Dennis Dickerson published his tome, “The African Methodist Church: A History,” in 2020; this work could have informed the Historical Foundations. Time management was a challenge. I could have taken out a week or two at critical points of the semester.

I am open to ways of preparing the congregation for the project. I pitch my observation this way because the Doctor of Ministry project will not be the last project that RAAME will experience. During the research project briefing I said that only two

persons shared their experiences: only two out of nineteen participants. I am exploring the possibility that people's expectations about the project were disappointed.

Finally, I must learn how to improve my communication skills. I was nervous about writing at the doctoral level after being out of the academy for so long. I kept my feelings to myself and did not reach out for help often enough. My interactions with my wonderful mentors, focus group peers, professional and context associates and all the people I encountered during this journey have helped to "crack my shell" and be more open to being transformed by liberation and reconciliation.

APPENDIX A
OPINION SURVEY

Opinion Survey

We are interested in understanding how the members of Richard Allen A.M.E. Church feel about reopening for in-person worship and participating in the pastor's research project. We greatly appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts. This survey will be anonymous, and the information will be kept private. We ask for age information only because of COVID-19 requirements.

1. How comfortable are you going back into the church for worship?

Very Comfortable

Somewhat uncomfortable

Somewhat comfortable

Very uncomfortable

Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable

2. Following up to the previous question, why do you feel that way?

3. When do you think the church should be opened for worship?

July

August

September

October

After October

January 2021

Other (please specify)

4. How do you hear about what is happening at RAAME?

Word of mouth

Social Media like Facebook or WhatsApp

Zoom

The conference call line

Other (please specify)

5. Have you heard about the pastor's research project that is to run during the month of August?

Yes

No

6. Would you be willing to participate in the research surveys?

Yes

No

7. What is your gender?

Female

Male

8. What is your age?

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

65 to 74

75 or older

APPENDIX B

PROJECT SURVEY: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Research Survey

1. I often feel that no matter what I do now, I will never make up for the mistakes I have made in the past.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

2. I find it hard to forgive myself for some of the things I have done wrong.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

3. When someone has hurt you, how often do you hold resentment or keep it inside?

Never
Hardly ever
Not too often
Fairly often
Very often
Does not apply

4. When someone has hurt you, how often do you try to get even in some way?

Never
Hardly ever
Not too often
Fairly often
Very often
Does not apply

5. When someone has hurt you, how often do you try to forgive the other person?

Never
Hardly ever
Not too often
Fairly often

Very often
Does not apply

6. I have grudges that I have held on to for months or years.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

7. I have forgiven those who have hurt me.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

8. Knowing that I am forgiven for my sins gives me the strength to face my faults and be a better person.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

9. I know that God forgives me.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

10. How often do you do the following: ask God's forgiveness when you have hurt someone?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

11. How often do you do the following: ask the other person's forgiveness when you have hurt someone?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

12. How often do you do the following: pray for someone who has hurt you?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Does not apply

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